EDGING TOWARD EQUITY

Creating Shared Opportunity in America’s Regions

REPORT FROM THE CONVERSATION ON REGIONAL EQUITY (CORE)
Edging Toward Equity: Creating Shared Opportunity in America’s Regions

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This document represents the synthesis of a two-year effort aimed at identifying key trends and needs in an emerging regional equity movement in America. Supported by the Ford Foundation and managed by the Center for Justice, Tolerance, and Community at the University of California, Santa Cruz, the initiative brought together a group of leading “thinkers and doers” in this field to distill key lessons from local and state-level efforts around the country. Our meetings included site visits to Detroit and Los Angeles where we met with leading actors from business, labor, the public sector, non-profits, environmental groups, and community-based organizations. Covering a variety of issues, including economic development, governance structures, media strategies, constituency-building, and capacity development, our goal was to outline for the Ford Foundation and the broader regional equity movement a forward looking research, policy, and organizing agenda.

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Finally, we wish to acknowledge the field into which we are contributing these ideas. Just a glimmer in a few leaders’ eyes a decade or so ago, the growing movement for regional equity has become a linchpin for rethinking the landscape of our cities and metropolitan areas. We believe that the style it has developed – looking for common ground across race, class, and geography, understanding the need to combine economic competitiveness with fairness and sustainability, and putting forth both an idealistic vision of America’s promise and pragmatic fixes to today’s problems – is relevant for national as well as regional politics. We honor those who have inspired and continue to drive this effort, and hope that this document contributes to an honest discussion about the path ahead.
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INTRODUCTION
The tragedy of Hurricane Katrina exposed the scars of poverty and isolation that have long characterized urban America. Disaster relief, slow in coming, left thousands of Gulf Coast residents stranded and then seemingly abandoned, with pictures of their despair broadcast endlessly on twenty-four hour cable. Yet the factors that drove the pattern of crisis – concentrated poverty, racial segregation, and lack of access to transit – are all too typical of a country where wealth inequities have been growing and fiscal capacity has been shrinking.

It may be easy to let despair and pessimism characterize our national response to both the sudden impact of Katrina and the slow-motion disasters that have engulfed many urban areas. America, it is perceived, fought a war on such poverty in the 1960s – and poverty seemingly won. Population flight from many central cities, some suggest, is a rational response to economic trends, with millions choosing better schools and better opportunities in outlying jurisdictions. And there is often little love lost between cities and suburbs, particularly in the polarized politics of the contemporary U.S.

Yet across the nation a new approach to urban and metropolitan development has begun to take root. Sometimes called regional or metropolitan equity, this view notes that the simultaneous processes of urban poverty and suburban sprawl are often driven as much by public policy as by market forces. It argues that community developers who work in poor neighborhoods need to broaden their scope to encompass metropolitan decision-making and understand how jurisdictional fragmentation generates spatial inequality. It argues that older inner-ring suburbs now face demographic and economic realities that irrevocably link them with their central city neighbors. And it challenges business leaders to recognize that overall competitiveness is poorly served when parts of the regional economy are suffering.

Momentum on the regional equity agenda is building. New policies, such as “fix it first” approaches to transportation planning target central city infrastructure and reduce the subsidies to sprawling development. Networks of community organizations, often based in faith institutions, have connected neighborhoods across the geography of their respective metro areas to create new regional dialogues about transportation, housing, and workforce development. Private sector developers are showing interest in the concepts of infill housing, the potential of central city workers, and the possibility of partnering with community-based leaders. The labor movement has seen a revitalization of its regional central labor councils in ways that have enhanced their influence, power, and impact on alleviating working poverty.

We are, in short, at the beginning of something potentially big – an emerging movement that can challenge the landscape of urban America in ways that meet the needs of a 21st century economy. For those who have been advocating for this new regional approach for the last decade, it is time to step back from the early boosterism and seriously consider the tensions, tightropes, and possibilities for the years to come.

This means a close look at the differences in strategies and tactics utilized by regional equity practitioners. That such differences are significant does not mean that they are fatal – and our attempt to understand them in this document is not driven by the usual desire to split hairs in search of the “best” strategy. Such an approach, we agree, has often led progressive movements in America to run aground in a sea of recrimination and division. Rather, we think it is important to understand different strands in order to determine intersecting strategies and principles at a critical moment in this movement’s evolution. *E pluribus unum* – from many, one – is both a
slogan for this country and, we think, a guiding light for the emerging regional equity agenda.

WHY REGIONALISM AND WHY REGIONAL EQUITY?
The regional equity movement has emerged within the broader development of “new regionalism,” an approach that stresses the importance of the region as a fundamental scale for understanding and addressing the global economy and environmental sustainability. It has also grown out of the community development field, an area of practice occupied by organizations that have labored for decades to improve the conditions of America’s poorest residents through localized investments in housing, business revitalization, and job training.

Yet the regional equity approach is distinct in two ways. First, it pays particular attention to how regional patterns of development have been responsible for many of the challenges facing low income and older communities. Second, it essentially hitches its pro-equity wagon to the rest of the emerging regionalist agenda, arguing that new regional approaches, including scattered-site mixed income housing, urban growth boundaries, and metropolitan-based workforce development efforts, could serve low income residents better than the traditional place-based strategies of community developers working in isolation from these dynamics.

The regional equity approach is also unique in its insistence that America’s patterns of regional inequality – including significant disparities in fiscal resources, school quality, and infrastructure adequacy – are not simply the result of market forces or inevitable demographic trends. Federal housing policy, it is suggested, facilitated single-family housing development on “greenfield” sites at the metropolitan periphery, often ignoring the need for affordable homeownership policies in dense, urban neighborhoods. Transportation policy has historically focused on freeways and auto-dependent development, neglecting the market demand for urban mass transit. Fragmented local government structures contributed to urban decline, as middle-class residents fled to the suburbs to escape the rising tax burden of maintaining older urban areas.

But the policies that played a role in fashioning our urban landscape policy will be changed not simply through the presentation of good ideas and solid research: political will must be built through organizing and building new coalitions. One challenge to coalition-building is that the pattern of urban sprawl reflects an underlying division by race, an issue that is frequently difficult to discuss and bridge in America.

This is not a debate peculiar to the regional equity movement. The question of how much to emphasize race and racial differences in American politics runs through nearly every aspect of policy making and coalition-building. Yet it is a particularly sharp tension in metropolitan debates precisely because one frequent pattern in America’s urban form – struggling central

DEFINING REGIONAL EQUITY
We are among those who seek to build a prosperous and inclusive America. Current patterns of metropolitan development in America have created isolation, inequality and political marginalization for many groups in society. Patterns of concentrated poverty, concentrated wealth, and racial segregation not only strain our community values but also impair our economic vitality. Building inclusive and equitable regions is important for both social justice and economic competitiveness.

Achieving regional equity means considering both people and place. A competitive and inclusive region is one in which members of all racial, ethnic, and income groups have opportunities to live and work in all parts of the region, have access to living wage jobs and are included in the mainstream of regional life. It is in also one in which all neighborhoods are supported to be vibrant places with choices for affordable housing, good schools, access to open space, decent transit that connects people to jobs, and healthy and sustainable environments.

To achieve regional equity, we need strong civic institutions that allow residents to be politically engaged and have significant input into public decisions. To build these institutions we need a movement that has a moral center, links with daily life experiences and values, and has the capacity to mobilize across constituencies and place. Such a civic and movement infrastructure should leverage both market forces and policy change to achieve prosperity and equity at a regional level.

Because regional fortunes are affected by policy at federal, state and local levels, regional action can occur in many arenas and reform efforts offer multiple opportunities to achieve progress and build power. Linking together regional efforts can create a national movement with the potential to forge a sense of common destiny for people and communities across the nation.
SPRAWL: IS IT MARKET OR POLICY?

Mary Gonzalez. Several years ago, the Gamaliel Foundation did some research and uncovered that there are over $600 billion dollars expected to be spent on transportation in the greater Chicago area. The city of Chicago was to receive only 15 percent of the money when they have 40 percent of the population. Myron Orfield describes how in developing the wealthy suburb of Minnetonka, over $360 million in public funds were required – but only $30 million came from the people who purchased the homes. The rest was government subsidy to people of wealth. In Buffalo, Cleveland, St. Louis, Gary, Indiana, Toledo, Kansas City, Newark, Hartford and many other cities, it can be shown that for every home built in the suburbs, a house is abandoned in the inner city; for every church built in the suburbs, a church closes in the inner city; for every mall built in the suburbs, whole business strips are abandoned in the city. Gary, Indiana has been in nearly continuous decline for over 40 years, yet if one goes up in a helicopter and looks at the whole region, the region itself is doing okay – thousands of homes have been built and billion-dollar malls have been created. If one were to play the process on fast forward, one could almost hear and feel the “giant sucking sound” of capital and opportunity being drained from Gary into its suburbs.

In terms of a wealthy suburban ring and poor inner-city areas, many inner-ring and older outer-ring suburbs are facing similar problems of disinvestment and decline. In the 1990s, the poverty rates in central cities actually declined while it rose in America’s suburbs. Moreover, while the nation’s cities and housing markets remain segregated by race, the change in the suburbanization rates for African Americans and Latinos is dramatic (see Figure 1).

Yet many communities of color have been suspicious of regionalism, particularly where minority political power is based on geographic concentration, and so higher levels of regional governance are seen as diluting a policy voice hard-won at local levels. In Louisville, Kentucky, for example, the African-American community was largely opposed to a city-country merger for exactly that reason, and in Cleveland, Ohio, African-American leaders have seen regionalism as being primarily driven by white suburban communities. Building new alliances in this context seems to require facing the reality of racial politics and tensions.

Striking a balance is possible. We arrived for a visit in Los Angeles just in the wake of the electoral victory of Antonio Villaraigosa. The first Latino mayor in over 130 years, his victory was strongly supported by regional equity advocates who had worked to win landmark Community Benefits Agreements, build a new metropolitan labor movement, and secure landmark changes in regional policies for environmental justice. Villaraigosa also campaigned on what might seem to be a regionalist platform: he promised to help the city “grow smarter, grow greener, grow together, and grow more civic-minded.” And many of his first moves as mayor, including resolving a labor dispute to protect the regional tourist industry and taking a leadership position in the regional transportation agency, signalled his understanding and commitment to a regional equity agenda.

Figure 1. City and Suburban Mix by Ethnic Group for Top U.S. Metro Areas, 1980-2000

Data from U.S. Census for all metropolitan areas with populations greater than 500,000 in 2000.
The new mayor had downplayed race in his campaign, lifting up common aspirations for education, public safety, and economic betterment, and stressing a common narrative of hope and promise for Los Angeles. At the same time, he built on a political history of advocacy for racial justice in his previous positions, and he was seen as someone who understood the racial realities of the city’s politics. In short, Villaraigosa’s campaign embodied the tensions that are present in the regional equity movement – the need to have credibility on issues of race while crafting a vision and policy package that can create broad agreement.

Any framework developed also needs to recognize that regional equity strategies are not simply about the needs of poor Americans; unbalanced and sprawling growth has also undermined economic efficiency and competitiveness, promoted bureaucratic duplication and fragmentation, and led to high environmental costs, including air pollution and loss of open space. Indeed, research on America’s regions covering both the 1980s and the 1990s suggests that more equitable regions may actually boast better economic performance, partly because equity is associated with increasing human capital and partly because sharing burdens and benefits can lead to more agreement on growth strategies. For this reason, regional equity advocates can often find common ground with business, municipal and environmental leaders who are promoting more balanced urban development strategies.

Despite the appeal to the common good, the guidepost of regional equity efforts must be reshaping urban policy and urban development in ways that improve the life-chances of the low-income communities, often of color, that have been left behind. Of the three E’s that have been the pillars for the emerging new regionalist perspective – economy, environment, and equity – the first two E’s have deep constituencies and strong support. We are concerned, however, that equity proponents sharpen the analysis and organizing to make sure issues of fairness, inclusion, and mobility receive their proper due in the emerging policy framework.

**WHAT ARE THE OPPORTUNITIES?**

The gap in regional institutions implies that regional equity proponents must better understand the geography of change – that is, the multiple levels (federal, state, and local) at which policy needs to be moved. The federal overlay is remarkably important, setting the ground rules for much of what happens on the ground. However, the opportunities for change seem more limited here than at the state level and local level. Some organizers argue that a national movement should therefore scale up from specific efforts, such as Community Benefits Agreements that promote equitable development in key urban areas, or build...
from policy reform in bellwether states where conditions are ripe for change.

We believe that work has to occur at all these levels and that there may be key opportunities in the arenas of housing, transportation, and workforce development. Each is central to the fate of lower-income residents, and each has become important to state official and regional business leaders worried about competitiveness and fiscal health. While it is always important to challenge the basic parameters of metropolitan development, particularly with policies like regional tax sharing and strict urban growth boundaries, it is often easier to channel reform efforts that are already underway than to place new issues on the policy table – and housing, transportation, and workforce development are agenda arenas where action is already underway.

The task, however, is to shift policy in a direction that is more favorable for disadvantaged communities. Housing policy could be pushed toward expanding opportunities for low- and moderate income families in both cities and suburbs, particularly using the concept of “workforce housing.” Federal and state tax incentives could boost home ownership for working families, providing the stepping stone to wealth that so many households lack. Deconcentration of poverty could be encouraged though expanding the HOPE VI program, providing more vouchers giving low-income renters more choices, and shifting governance of both public housing and vouchers to the metropolitan level. The federal government could also make it easier to allocate low-income housing tax credit to areas of growing employment in the suburbs, not just to areas of current distress in the inner city.

At the local level, the push for “inclusionary zoning” is another key element in creating mixed-income and high-opportunity neighborhoods. New Jersey helped pave the way with the Mt. Laurel cases that required wealthier municipalities to make room for affordable housing. But the state also worked against its aims with the creation of Regional Contribution Agreements that allow one municipality to pay another to take its share of lower-priced housing. Eliminating such loopholes and prompting real integration by income is essential to open opportunities and choice to inner city residents.

Transportation funding could be reformed to promote more integration of systems as well as to stir development near rail and bus transfer stations. While usually thought to be anathema to equity concerns, attention could be paid to promoting market mechanisms – such as tolls and value pricing – to ease congestion on major thoroughfares at peak traffic times, particularly if the resulting revenues can be targeted to the expansion of mass transit for lower income residents. Transportation policy could also promote higher standards of managerial efficiency, programmatic effectiveness, and fiscal responsibility within participatory processes that help set regional priorities.

As technical as transportation policy may seem, community organizations have shown interest in these issues through an impressive set of policy intermediaries, community development corporations, and interfaith
networks. The Bus Riders Union in Los Angeles, for example, has helped better connect residents to the region’s opportunities through both its efforts to shift resources to bus lines and its Countywide New Service campaign which seeks to expand service to reach job centers, schools, and hospitals. In Northwest Indiana, an interfaith federation brought together black and white congregations to fight for the formation of a regional transportation authority that would coordinate and improve services to inner city residents and suburban commuters alike. Transportation moves people – and transportation issues can move communities.

Workforce and economic development is another area ripe for intervention. Clearly, there are issues of spatial mismatch, particularly as the suburbanization of employment has proceeded over the last several decades, especially in America’s largest metropolitan areas (see Figure 2). Yet globalization has created new insecurities for workers and firms in both cities and suburbs, and business is clearly interested in new regional strategies to compete. Communities and labor unions are rightly worried that this is a cover for cutting wages and benefits but building an effective strategy for “living wages” will require more than rhetoric and legislation focused on fairness. It will also involve developing a new vision of the economy that combines: a) strategic growth to promote industries that provide family sustaining wage; b) the development of jobs that are accessible to large sectors of the population, not just the highly educated; c) improving economic mobility and thereby facilitating cross-firm career staircases in regional labor markets; and d) raising the base salaries in low-wage jobs.

What about the policy stalwarts of regionalist thinkers: cross-jurisdiction tax-pooling and stronger metropolitan planning? We believe that both strategies make great sense. A shared tax base reduces the incentives for sprawl while shared planning enhances the power to spread housing fairly, connect residents with opportunity, and steer growth back to older cities. But while regional tax-sharing has proved effective in the few places in which it has been implemented, it has been a tough sell around the country. Regional growth management and planning, including the strategic use of urban growth boundaries, has been more popular, but political traction is still coming up short. Prioritization of strategies will have to take into account these realities.

WHERE IS THERE A COMMON AGENDA?

The opportunities outlined here in housing, transportation, workforce and economic development are applicable to every metropolitan region. And yet it is also important to recognize the diversity of social, political and economic circumstances in regions throughout the country. These regional differences create significantly different contexts, and the specific strategies and policies that may work in one region may be inappropriate in other regions. It is important for regional equity advocates to take such differences into account, both in their specific local efforts, and in their efforts to link up to a broader national movement.

Community development specialist Denise Fairchild explains the implementation of the Community Benefits Agreement associated with the Staples Center expansion in Los Angeles
One of the most basic dimensions of regional differences lies in the level of local government fragmentation. “Little-box” states – those states with many, small, local government units – have more fragmented regional decision making processes, and as a result tend to have higher levels of inequality and sprawl. By contrast, “big-box” states – those states where existing cities have found it easier to annex land and there are fewer, larger municipalities within metropolitan areas – tend to do slightly better in measurements of regional equity and opportunity. This does not necessarily imply that regions with fragmented government should focus on consolidating government structures. Studies generally find that while mergers and consolidation of local government can help improve efficiency and fiscal health, without a proactive equity agenda, they will do little to improve disparities in schools, housing and public resources – having an equity focus is central. But regions with more fragmented local government structures do frequently face greater challenges in pursuing regionwide policy solutions than do metropolitan areas with more consolidated structures, and as a result are more likely to pay attention to state-level levers and more informal decision making process at a regional scale.

Another major dimension of regional difference lies in the economic realm, between so-called “strong market” versus “weak market” cities. Weak market cities – such as the older manufacturing centers of the Midwest – tend to face long-term economic decline with little job growth, and associated challenges of major population dislocation from the urban core, an aging infrastructure deterioration, and high levels of racial segregation. Here the challenges lie primarily in revitalizing the core cities and older suburbs, reclaiming vacant and abandoned properties, and promoting affordable housing options in opportunity-rich neighborhoods in the region. Strong market cities – such as the rapidly growing regions of the southwest and Florida – face a different set of challenges, with escalating housing prices, increasingly congested traffic, and the proliferation of low-wage service sector jobs (often filled by increasing immigrant populations). Here, the challenges lie more in promoting affordable housing throughout the region, raising wage and employment standards in low-paid jobs, and promoting more community benefits from the major development initiatives.

Regions throughout the country also differ significantly in their racial composition. The classic picture of white suburbs and a black inner city has been altered by the suburbanization of people of color. Yet the levels of city-suburban racial dissimilarity remain significantly higher in the predominantly white/black cities of the North and Northeast, than in the “blended” cities (such as New York, Los Angeles, Miami), the predominantly white-black cities of the South, or even cities of the South and West that are majority white. These racial differences make for very different political dynamics between cities and suburbs, and different opportunities for regional coalition building.

What about America’s rural areas? Some may think of regional equity, with its focus on hollowed-out central cities and increasingly hollowed-out central cities and increasingly
disadvantaged inner ring suburbs, as a sort of stealth revival of urbanism. But rural communities also have a stake in regional equity. Poverty and inequality have long plagued many rural communities, and new growth pressures from metropolitan suburbs, especially far flung “exurbs,” mean that sprawl and its problems are spilling into rural communities adjacent to cities. The natural resources that are the common backbone of rural areas can be threatened by these dynamics – overuse driven by poverty and land loss driven by sprawl – and yet these resources are also critical to a sustainable American future. Rural communities can and must be the stewards of the watersheds, open spaces, forests, and working waterfronts that are also important to urban residents. They are important political allies in any effort for sustainable metropolitan communities.

To build alliances, we must first recognize that twenty first century rural America is made up of at least three groups. The first are communities at the metropolitan fringe that are threatened by sprawl and skyrocketing land values – some urban and suburban residents pushed out by high housing costs are reportedly “driving until they qualify” for a mortgage. These areas, where two thirds of rural Americans live, are already the next frontier for sprawl, and rising housing costs for long-term and low-income residents create the same equity challenges faced elsewhere. The second group consists of high amenity communities, some adjacent to metropolitan areas and some remote, that are attracting second home and retired newcomers as the millions of baby boomers and a growing number of professionals seek to live in places with attractive natural settings as well as the social benefits of small neighborly community life. Finally, there are communities, often persistently poor, that have agricultural or natural resource extraction economies that face sharp global competition and diminished prospects.

Within each of these rural Americas exist potential allies who would benefit from the precepts of regional equity and environmental sustainability – and from linking their fates with those in cities. Moving forward means rejecting the idea that rural America is destined to die out – or that its only path to economic prosperity is through a sort of “me-too” pattern of unrestrained sprawl. Instead, we should wed our concern for the livelihoods of rural people and the resiliency of rural communities to the broader national and global concern for environmental stewardship and health. We should help build an economy that can sustain a middle class on the signature characteristic of all rural areas: the natural resource base, which must be sustained for future generations.

This balancing act has been done quite brilliantly by groups like the Sierra Business Council in the Lake Tahoe area bordering California and Nevada. Their leadership has helped to resolve the usual conflicts between environmental preservationists and business by stressing that the wealth of the region is based on exactly the natural assets that both groups want to protect. Groups in the rural South like the Enterprise Corporation for the Delta are improving access to financial services and through their Emerging Markets Partnership working to expand regional capacity through job creation, entrepreneurship, asset development for low income people, and strengthening infrastructure to be competitive in the new economy. But these efforts often remain isolated from urban allies – and vice versa. Building a regional equity movement

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**CROSSING BRIDGES**

*Angela Glover Blackwell:* We are crossing new bridges, connecting to the market, to the public sector, to people who think about planning in ways we haven't before. It allows us to have a big conversation. Not since the rise of the community building approach have we had such a broad approach. Even within community building, it was more of a service orientation. But in these conversations, we really can talk about the whole picture, including politics and power, in ways that are beyond mere talk, and we can go forward. People have longed for an organizing framework, and this helped fill that need.
edging toward equity requires forging new bonds of understanding, interest, and action. And it requires acknowledging that one size does not fit all in terms of strategies, policies, and coalitions. The message of potential allies and alliances does seem to be getting through. In 2002, over 600 attendees came to a conference on regional equity held in Los Angeles and coordinated by PolicyLink and the Funders’ Network for Smart Growth and Livable Communities. In 2005, a follow-up conference drew over 1300 participants to Philadelphia, with both years together showing a remarkable geographic reach in terms of interest (see Figure 3). Clearly, there are gaps in terms of potential constituencies and parts of the country, but we are also seeing a remarkable surge of interest in a new way of approaching both metropolitan development and the broader task of refashioning a more competitive and inclusive America.

WHAT ARE THE TENSIONS AND TIGHTROPEs?
It is relatively easy to identify the ways that regional patterns of growth and development in American cities contribute to patterns of inequality in our society, and to identify ways in which coordinated regional strategies could have significant impact on improving economic opportunity for disadvantaged populations. Building the political will and consensus to make change, however, is a more difficult process.

It would be nice to believe that a rational set of ideas – ones that are well-researched, well-reasoned, and well-intentioned – could successfully wake policy makers from the national nightmare of sprawl and inequality. But the current pattern of development has clearly served some interests, however short-term those may be. The regional equity movement, in short, must be serious about building power and building allies if its own best ideas are to be realized.
We’re really talking about alignment in
- In Cleveland, African-American leader
The people in leadership understand
- To do this requires honesty when addressing
groups move forward on a shared agenda.
Such a common framework allows for serious
understanding and a sense of common destiny.
- communities, but also about building
only about building trust across different
leadership from the grassroots.
Doing both of these effectively requires building
long-term personal relationships, especially in
cross-constituency institutions and processes.
While easier said than done, there are
a number of innovative efforts around
the country that focus on building such
relationships. The Gamaliel Foundation, an
interfaith network with affiliates in more
than 45 metropolitan areas around the
country, has been linking urban and suburban
congregations through both the painstaking
process of “one-on-one” meetings and joint
congregant action on common issues. The
labor movement in Silicon Valley has created
a training program for community and
civic leaders that aims to provide a common
understanding of shared prosperity. And
the major victories many progressives point
to in Los Angeles – including the largest
Community Benefits Agreements in the
country, significant progress on addressing
environmental inequities, and the recent
election of a mayor with an agenda well-steeped in regional equity principles – all stem from a series on intersecting circles of
leadership that have known and worked with
each other for years.
The importance of these relationships is not
only about building trust across different
communities, but also about building
understanding and a sense of common destiny.
Such a common framework allows for serious
debates and conflicts even as individuals and
groups move forward on a shared agenda.
To do this requires honesty when addressing
the various tensions and tightropes
that groups have experienced around
the country.
As mentioned
earlier, perhaps the
most important
simmering tension
centers on the role
of race. Regional
equity strategies,
after all, sometimes
present an apparent
contradiction.
On the one hand, race has frequently
been at the center of regional equity
discussions and
certainly at the heart
of the fragmentation
and sprawl that
characterize our
metropolitan
landscapes. On the other hand, efforts
to find common
ground across city
and suburb, rich
and poor, white
and minority
has
sometimes led to
a politics in which
issues of race
are set aside and
diffused within issues of regional competitive
advantage or particular approaches to better
urban planning (e.g. transportation reform,
affordable housing, and smart growth).
Why the rhetorical shift to a more race-
free approach? Some argue there are times
when at least tactically, and sometimes even
strategically, using a broad based approach
focusing on competitiveness for example, can
be more effective in alliance building than

**RACE AND REGIONALISM**

_Angela Glover Blackwell:_ I come to this work out of a racial equity perspective. “Regional equity” is helpful because it allows us to mainstream our discussions and get a new boost. But I don’t think we achieve racial equity unless we actually focus on racial equity. We need to address the unwillingness to deal with race, which continues to place people of color at a disadvantage.

_Bruce Katz:_ We’re really talking about alignment in our work. Take “Fix It First” [a strategy in the Detroit region to invest in existing transportation infrastructure in the City and inner-ring suburbs before building new roads in the suburbs]. We’re making three arguments in favor of “Fix It First”: efficiency, fiscal responsibility, and equity. All of those come together in a politician’s mind. We’re not promoting just competitiveness, but inclusive growth also.

_John Powell:_ In Cleveland, African-American leadership have pushed back against regionalism, saying it has been driven by the white suburbs. They want a kind of regionalism where the interests of African-Americans are up front, and they are pushing us to better say where regionalism has actually benefited marginalized people and where it hasn’t.

_Carl Anthony:_ The people in leadership understand the language of competitiveness. They don’t really understand racism and inequality. I don’t think you can really make an argument that we should talk about mixed-income housing, workforce housing and all these things, as if racism doesn’t exist. I think it is necessary to lift this up, and there is going to be tension there. But I don’t think you can get black people in substantial numbers involved in this kind of discussion unless we deal specifically with race. I think the reality is that we’re going to have to do both.
explicitly focusing on what certain policies may do for promoting racial inequality. Perhaps more frequently, the real challenges in talking productively about race and racism lead many to de-emphasize race or racial inequality in their efforts to focus on an inclusive regionalism. Others argue, however, that downplaying race sacrifices credibility with those very communities of color that could serve as one of the strongest possible constituencies of the regional equity movement. Race is always “right there” for these constituencies as a factor shaping opportunity and access, and not acknowledging it does not make it go away. Moreover, ignoring race can also lead to analytical and political mistakes, such as failing to see why there is resistance to regionalism by some communities of color worried about losing the influence and political voice which is often associated with geographic concentration.

How to square the circle? We have been struck by those regionalist leaders who have been able to play “both sides” – speaking in universal terms of hope and progress while being honest and attentive to the particular issues facing particular communities. It is a difficult balancing act – but one which progressive movements, such as the civil right movements, have been able to do before. And such a balance is necessary if the regional equity movement is to fully live up to its potential.

Another key tension involves the mix of market and the state forces. Again, this is not particular to the regional equity arena but it is especially salient given the evolution of our urban form through a combination of biased public policy and individual market choices. It is important to stress changes on the policy side of this ledger and to seek changes on the market side as well. However, many disadvantaged communities distrust markets as a remedy, partly because “market pressures” have been used as an excuse for wage cuts, tax breaks, and neighborhood abandonment.

Whatever the past may have been, the regional equity movement must now be fashioned in a way that is market-friendly – and fortunately there are real opportunities for economic development initiatives to support regional equity goals. The economic advantages of agglomeration, particularly in knowledge-intensive and creative industries, presents a business case for inner city development. Partly as a result, there are a growing number of examples of new developments around the country that are demonstrating profitability while also promoting development in disadvantaged areas, particularly by building mixed-income residential spaces along with mixed-used commercial space. Regulatory changes, such as metropolitan growth boundaries, can help reorient such market processes towards inner-city and denser developments. Inclusionary zoning can help guarantee that revitalization does not mean displacement by gentrification. The bottom line is that it has become increasingly possible to pursue a new “double bottom line” – investments that are good for business and good for community.
Creating Shared Opportunity

Regional equity proponents must also be willing to be receptive to economic development. Demands for living wages need to be coupled with strategies that actually generate such jobs. This is a tough challenge – it means accepting some of the premises and language of “competitiveness,” thinking through the mix of leading and local-serving sectors, and embracing productivity gains even as pressure is kept to raise wages and access to health care for those on the bottom of the labor market. But the challenge and promise of regional equity is that it may be able to secure the vision of social well-being and competitiveness as equally valued goals – and so regional equity proponents must demonstrate that they are as interested in economic growth as they expect business to be interested in social inclusion.

The mutuality of economic gain and social justice underscores the potential of regional equity as a framework for bringing together unusual stakeholders. But it also underscores that they are sometimes brought together though unusual mechanisms. The now-celebrated transit-oriented development program in Oakland’s Fruitvale neighborhood grew out of the community’s rejection of transit authority plans to convert prime inner city real estate to parking for suburban commuters. Project Quest, a much-heralded job training program in San Antonio, Texas, grew out of organizing by community-based groups who initially pushed for business responsibility and then enticed the same businesses into collaboration in actual training and placement.

The point is that conflict and collaboration co-exist, sometimes in sequence and sometimes simultaneously. The tensions around race and regionalism, and the efforts to link social change perspectives with profitable market opportunities, highlight that it is possible to have different groups collaborating on regional issues without necessarily sharing common perspectives or visions for the region. Regional collaboration is possible without total regional consensus. It does require, however, a certain acceptance of the inevitability of disagreeing with others even as we secure agreements on other common areas of interest.

Working together is essential. In our view, regional equity requires doing transactions – or “deals” – to convince people that there are viable strategies to raise wages, provide transportation, and build housing. But it is also fundamental to promote what we think of as political and public transformations – that is, realizations by critical actors and decision-makers that cities and suburbs are linked, that fairness makes business sense, and that policy must reflect underlying values of opportunity and mobility.

Taking seriously the possibilities of regional equity as a movement also means taking seriously civic engagement and consciousness-raising.

**BUILDING COLLABORATION**

Amy Dear: One of the biggest capabilities that I think entrepreneurial leaders have is the ability to understand the interests of others. That is so critical. When you understand someone else's interest, that doesn’t mean that there will automatically be an intersection of interests. But you at least know what the parameters have to be to have some relationship. When you sit down with someone, you don’t say “here’s what I need from you, and how am I going to convince you of that.” Instead, you put a vision out for people to excite them, and you create a pathway, or at least draw a picture for them of how they fit in. Now you can’t do that if you don’t: A) have some big picture view of the world, and B) understand what that other group’s interests are.

**HOW DO WE KNOW IT’S WORKING?**

In the few years that regional equity proponents have been at work with this paradigm, there have been a series of encouraging victories. The Market Creek Plaza project in San Diego, supported by both foundations and the private sector, offers a vision of how urban revitalization can create more, not less, opportunities for residents that have stuck through a neighborhood’s troubled times. The Atlanta Neighborhood Development Partnership is raising awareness about the need for affordable housing throughout the region, and securing support
from business, suburban leaders, and other unlikely actors. In San Jose, labor and community groups have become a voice for smarter growth in the planning for Coyote Valley, one of the largest new developments in California in decades. In West Chicago, Bethel New Life has shown how to revitalize a poor neighborhood by linking up with region-serving rail lines and creating environmentally friendly transit-oriented development.

The question remaining, however, is what do all these real but small victories add up to in terms of both policy lessons and political momentum? One of the challenges of building a regional equity movement is understanding what makes for success and which strategies are working. While such discussions can ring of evaluation, this is not the point. Rather, it is necessary to collectively determine priorities – if this is a movement in the early stages of development, it will need to garner resources and deploy them effectively. And while this cannot be done without the voice of those doing the actual work, we think it is important to begin the conversation and develop metrics that suggest measuring the possibilities of change.

One approach is to develop indicators of equity outcomes within a region, both by jurisdiction and by population group, that can give an indication of whether equity goals are being met. If these trends are improving for target populations and jurisdictions, then perhaps regional equity programs and policies are succeeding; if outcomes are worsening, then such policies are either not working or are insufficient to reverse other more adverse trends, and new policies must be developed. But it is also important to keep in mind the standard of comparison for a particular region, whether it is to overall national trends, or to trends in comparable regions throughout the country.

Specific indicators could include both process measures and outcome measures. On the latter, it is important for the movement to decide if it is fundamentally about reducing disparities or fundamentally about reducing spatial segregation of the poor and people of color. Clearly, these are linked – studies of neighborhood effects, for example, suggest that concentrated poverty generally exacerbates the problems of the poor – but each implies different directions for policy improvement. Measures should also include both people-based indicators (such as racial gaps in home ownership) and place-based indicators (such as disparities in tax base). And the particular use of such indicators – whether regions use them to gauge their own progress or they are used to create a ranking system that induces regions to move up the list of “equity stars” – needs to be determined.

Given the diversity of social, demographic and economic conditions around the country, and the different political and policy terrains, it may also be valuable to develop methodologies for assessing the “readiness” of a region for regional equity efforts. Such methods could also identify those issues that are likely to resonate with large numbers of people and have a reasonable chance of success. Groups around the country have developed various regional audits and power analysis techniques to help promote this process. Such audits can identify unexpected entry points for regional equity campaigns as well as point to unlikely partners and allies.

WHAT DO WE NEED TO BE MORE EFFECTIVE?

Building a successful regional equity movement requires vision and commitment. In our view, there needs to be specific
progress on what we term the three I’s – ideas, institutions, and infrastructure – and all will require long-term investments by foundations, policy entrepreneurs, the private sector, labor unions, community organizations, and others.

Ideas matter. We realize that “framing and defining” has become a new trend in political discourse. But one of the appeals of the regional equity movement is exactly that it affords us a new perspective that links communities and defines a new balance of economic growth and social justice. Equity advocates have found an ideological home in the movement, one that both makes sense to them and allows the equity message to be sent in ways that are consistent with the imperatives of economic and environmental sustainability. Yet much remains to be done on defining the regional equity frame clearly and succinctly. While some of this clarity can be achieved through the use of metrics that compare metropolitan areas on their performance relative to regional equity criteria – the task we laid out earlier – there is a broader task involving conversations about defining goals, values, and language.

Ideas need institutions if they are to become actionable. Movement leaders sometime shy away from this fact, perhaps because of concerns that policy advocacy and influence will move too far from the grassroots. But the places where we have seen the equity agenda take root are also often places where community organizing networks are strong, central labor councils have power, and national and local intermediaries play a useful role. We need to strengthen these institutions by helping them build capacity and by making conscious use of national intermediaries and organizing networks to help stitch together a broader movement.

One particular area of concern is improving capacities around power analysis and politics. Many community-based organizations, particularly in the community development field, have often moved into a mode of service provision or housing construction. This move, often encouraged by foundations, tends to push them away from politics – and the result is that many urban areas have an infrastructure of organizations that are structurally separated from efforts to advocate for particular political and policy changes at a regional level.

This is where an “infrastructure for change” can play a role. Many organizations have suggested the importance of having their own research and analytical capacities so that their equity agendas do not get diffused as they begin to work regionally with potential allies in the business and environmental communities. Investments in broad civic leadership, particularly when bringing together unexpected allies, is critical. And there are specific opportunities to train black and Latino elected officials, particularly those just arriving to power in inner-ring suburbs, in best practices for more sustainable metropolitan development.

We also need to support institutions that can share best practices. One of the wonders of the market is its capacity for diffusion – when one company figures out how to build a better product, others face competitive pressure to rapidly follow suit. Social change organizations do not have such automatic mechanisms and yet the stakes of adapting or not adapting new innovations are often even higher for people’s daily lives. We need to understand this “dissemination gap” and fill it by sharing what we are learning across regions.

There are, of course, numerous other strategic investments that would make great sense.

ON SHARING LESSONS AND PERSPECTIVES
Heetan Kalan: I don’t think we have enough collaborative structures that allow groups to come together. We need more of these institutions that are going to bridge the labor movement with the mainstream environmental movement, with the environmental justice movement, with the environmental health movement, and with the folks working on education and the folks working on prisons. I think it is the fragmentation of these issues that limits us. If groups fighting on whatever issue they are fighting on were asked to govern tomorrow, would we know how to do it?
We do not pretend to have an all-inclusive list and we do not mean to preclude other alternatives – rather we view this discussion as an invitation for further deliberation about what infrastructure is needed. Our only insistence is that such a conversation and prioritization take place. The movement has found resonance with the public, is beginning to mature, and must also generate the infrastructure to be more effective.

**HOW DO WE GET THERE?**

Moving forward requires understanding the future, setting priorities, and considering the timing of change. At their best, progressive movements project the possibility that the future will be brighter if only we are able to mobilize communities and resources. Unfortunately, contemporary progressives often seem to offer a pessimistic view: the environment is degrading, inequality is growing, and globalization will soon cost you your job.

We do not mean to be overly optimistic, but there are important trends working in directions that may favor regional equity. Demographics, for example, are favorable for central city development. The prototypical family of the suburban era – a married couple with school age children – now comprises less than 25 percent of all American households, and growing number of immigrants are attracted to central city employment and housing, with revitalization following in their wake. The economic scenario, while surely marked by global competition, is also pushing in the direction of urban concentrations, particularly for those “new economy” industries that require networking, collaboration, and creativity.

Can we harness these trends in the direction of positive regional development? This will require being realistic about the possibilities and the need to set priorities. The difficulty in finding agreement on priorities is not surprising for such a diverse movement. But it reflects more than differences in emphasis – the regional equity movement needs to be more explicit about a concept that is often used in the foundation world: its “theory of change.” By this, we mean how can we scale up from the current activities to a fully national movement?

Some argue that we need to select a series of key states where there are policy openings, perhaps because of a sympathetic governor or other key public officials, and deploy organizations, resources, and influence to create examples of change that will hopefully spread like wildfire. This approach emphasizes the need to move key leaders with decision-making power. Some stress the need to shore up the constituencies that can keep those decision-makers accountable. Others argue for interventions at a more local level, such as focusing on strategic cities, or for a series of investments in certain institutions, such as central labor councils, interfaith networks, or associations of community developers, that have great promise as regional equity champions. Another strategy suggests that we build up region-by-region, a patient process by which to lay the foundation for change.

Whatever the outcome of these debates, the task of scaling up is critical. Strong forces fashioned both the assets of metropolitan America, and its current challenges of segregation, economic vulnerability, and
environmental degradation; strong forces will be required to take advantage of positive trends and turn around what is not working. Such strength comes from a movement whose institutions and infrastructure are as vibrant as its ideas and whose scope is truly national.

Scaling up is critical for another reason: while regional equity holds out the hope of transforming regions like Los Angeles, Detroit, or Atlanta, it also represents new promise for the nation as a whole. For it is not just about transit-oriented development, cross-jurisdictional tax-sharing, or employer-oriented job training—it is about offering a new vision of America in which cities are strong, racial conflict is superseded, and millions more join the middle-class.

Realizing this hopeful American future may seem a daunting task in the midst of today's sometimes polarized politics. But recent history may give us reasons to be hopeful. In the 1950s, when the Montgomery bus boycott was launched, and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference was founded, few observers would have predicted the evolution of a Civil Rights Movement that entirely reshaped American politics and values. In the 1960s and 1970s, when offshore oil spills, worsening air pollution, and toxic contamination in places like Love Canal stirred the national consciousness, few could have known just how mainstream the principles and policies of environmental sustainability would become.

Can the regional equity movement become another transformative force for a better America? With vision and strategy born from honest conversation, we believe it can. With commitment and collaboration by unexpected partners, we believe it will. And with the challenges of racial and economic inequality still confronting us as we enter the 21st century, we believe it must.
SELECTED RESOURCES:

**Alliance for Regional Stewardship**
http://www.regionalstewardship.org/

**Atlanta Neighborhood Development Partnership**
http://www.andpi.org/

**Bethel New Life**
http://www.bethelnewlife.org/

**Brookings Institution**
http://www.brookings.edu/metro/metro.htm

**Carsey Institute**
http://www.carseyinstitute.unh.edu/

**Center for Community Change**
http://www.communitychange.org/

**Center for Justice, Tolerance and Community (CJTC)**
http://www.cjtcenter.org/

**Center for Law in the Public Interest**
http://www.clipi.org/

**Center for Neighborhood Technology**
http://www.cnt.org/

**Earth House**
http://www.earthhousecenter.org/

**Enterprise Foundation**
http://www.enterprisefoundation.org/

**Environmental Justice Resource Center**
http://www.ejrc.ca.gov/

**Ford Foundation**
http://www.fordfound.org/

**Funders’ Network for Smart Growth and Livable Communities**
http://www.fundersnetwork.org/

**Gamaliel Foundation**
http://www.gamaliel.org/default.htm

**Good Jobs First**
http://www.goodjobsfirst.org/

**Innovative Housing Institute**
http://www.inhousing.org/

**Institute on Race and Poverty**
http://www.irpumn.org/website/

**Invincible Cities**
http://invinciblecities.camden.rutgers.edu/intro.html

**Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity**
http://www.kirwaninstitute.org/

**The Local Initiative Support Corporation (LISC)**
http://www.lisc.org

**Los Angeles Alliance for a New Economy**
http://www.laane.org/

**The New World Foundation**
http://www.newwf.org/main.html

**PolicyLink**
http://www.policylink.org/

**Pratt Institute for Community & Environmental Development**
http://www.prattcenter.net/

**Redefining Progress**
http://www.rprogress.org/

**Smart Growth America**
http://www.smartgrowthamerica.com/

**Strategic Actions for a Just Economy**
http://saje.net/

**Strategic Concepts in Organizing and Policy Education (SCOPE)**
http://www.scopela.org

**Surface Transportation Policy Project**
http://www.transact.org/

**Sustainable Metropolitan Communities Initiative**
http://metroequity.net

**Urban and Environmental Policy Institute**
http://www.departments.oxy.edu/uepi/

**Urban Habitat**
http://www.urbanhabitat.org/

**Working Partnerships USA**
http://www.wpusa.org/

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Page 12 “Michigan Governor Jennifer Granholm…and MOSES leaders” by Otis Massey and MOSES.

Page 18 “Planning together…” Urban planning in Nepal - urban development through local efforts programme, photographer: Thomas L. Kelly, Deutsche Gesellschaft für technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ).
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