

State of Black Workers in America Conference

Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism
MAY 1, 2015 • 10 AM–4 PM

Sponsoring Organizations



The Institute for Research in African-American Studies (IRAAS) of Columbia University, founded in July 1993 by Dr. Manning Marable, is an academic resource center. The purposes and activities of the IRAAS are grounded within the best scholarship of the black intellectual tradition. Toward that end, the Institute administers the Undergraduate and Master's degree programs in African-American Studies at Columbia University; regularly sponsors academic conferences, lectures, and forums on a wide variety of topics; and produced the scholarly publication *SOULS: A Critical Journal of Black Politics, Culture and Society*, which is distributed throughout the U.S. and internationally, from 1995 to 2011.

IRAAS is an intellectual community that bridges scholarship, teaching, and public life. We envision the project of African-American Studies as a multi-disciplinary enterprise. Our faculty employ an array of theoretical approaches and methodological strategies to examine historical and contemporary formations in black culture, politics, and society.

The Institute has a rich tradition of scholarship which capitalizes upon our unique location in New York City, especially the dynamic community of Harlem. Currently, IRAAS engages in a broad program of research and teaching that attends to the diversity of black experiences in the global diaspora.

IRAAS understands education to be a necessarily transformative endeavor. To this end, our mission is threefold:

- To prepare students to become critical thinkers and global citizens;
- To facilitate and support innovative research (working groups, collaborative and individual projects, and faculty/student grants);
- To disseminate knowledge through academic and public forums including IRAAS "Conversations," lectures, roundtable discussions, conferences, and new media platforms.



As Washington's first progressive multi-issue think tank, the **Institute for Policy Studies (IPS)** has served as a policy and research resource for visionary social justice movements for over four decades—from the anti-war and civil rights movements in the 1960s to the peace and global justice movements of the last decade. Some of the greatest progressive minds of the 20th and 21st centuries have found a home at IPS, starting with the organization's founders, Richard Barnet and Marcus Raskin. IPS scholars have included such luminaries as Arthur Waskow, Gar Alperovitz, Saul Landau, Bob Moses, Rita Mae Brown, Barbara Ehrenreich, Roger Wilkins, and Orlando Letelier. Today the Institute's work is organized into more than a dozen projects, reflecting our public scholars' diverse areas of expertise.

The Black Worker Initiative is a bold and exciting new effort launched by the Institute for Policy Studies, which is deeply committed to helping achieve both the historic and contemporary aims of the labor and civil rights movements. Black workers have been particularly hard hit by the rising tide of inequality in today's economy. We hope our Initiative will be a part of the solution to helping expand opportunities for black worker organizing and thereby greatly aid the revitalization of the U.S. labor movement as a whole. Indeed, the Initiative operates under the belief that black workers hold a key role in union revitalization. Without a platform for their voices and perspectives, a vital piece of the progressive movement is absent from the greater public discourse on race and economic and social justice. The Initiative seeks to be a forum for these important conversations, allowing relationships, ideas, and projects to develop. The Initiative will use conferences, published reports, public education materials, and mainstream and social media in framing a road map to how black worker organizing can be an ongoing vehicle for the preservation of the labor movement and the promotion of civil rights and racial and economic justice.



Since its formation in 1977, the **Discount Foundation** has been committed to building power and has directed its funding to organizing that builds power among poor people and people of color. In 2009 the board began to explore ways to more explicitly fund African American organizations and constituencies. Unsatisfied with its own history of funding black movement building, the board also felt that the broader economic justice movement paid insufficient attention to black workers and racial inequity in the labor market. At the same time, there were no foundations that named black worker organizing as a core issue. After making a few pilot grants directed at addressing structural unemployment, beginning in 2012 Discount named black worker organizing as one of four funding priorities.



Founded in 1980, **Neighborhood Funders Group (NFG)** is a member-driven national network of grantmaking institutions. Its mission is to build the capacity of philanthropy to advance social justice and community change. NFG organizes the social justice philanthropy field, develops leaders within its national base of members, and encourages the philanthropic field to support policies and practices that advance economic, racial, and social justice. In 2013 NFG partnered with the Discount Foundation to host a convening of organizations that engage in organizing black workers, along with a small number of interested funders. With nearly fifty people in attendance, invited speakers discussed the state of the black jobs crisis, and participants shared their work and strategies and discussed the need for more attention and resources directed at black organizing. This report grew out of that gathering.

AGENDA

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10:00 am **Welcome and Opening Statements**

Marc D. Bayard, Associate Fellow and Director of the Black Worker Initiative, Institute for Policy Studies

Marcellus Blount, Associate Professor of English and Comparative Literature

Director, Graduate Studies—Institute for Research in African-American Studies, Columbia University

Professor Dorian Warren, Associate Professor of International & Public Affairs, IRAAS Faculty Affiliate,
Columbia University and MSNBC Contributor

Susan Wefald, Executive Director, Discount Foundation

10:30 am **Panel: Innovate, Organize, and Win:
Leveraging the Power and Promise of Black Women in Labor**

Moderated by Teresa Younger, President and CEO, Ms. Foundation for Women

Kimberly Freeman Brown, Author, *And Still I Rise: Black Women Labor Leaders' Voices, Power and Promise*

Erica Glenn-Byam, Shop Steward and Vice President of the Women's Committee,
Laborers' International Union of North America (LIUNA) Local 79

Dr. Luella Toni Lewis, Chair, Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Healthcare

Pierrette Talley, Secretary-Treasurer, Ohio American Federation of Labor-Congress of Industrial
Organizations (AFL-CIO)

Natalicia Tracy, Executive Director, Brazilian Workers Center

12:00 pm **Keynote Lunch Speaker, Melissa Harris-Perry, host of “Melissa Harris-Perry” on MSNBC**

1:00 pm **Panel: Reflections on Black Workers: A Conversation with Philanthropic, Civil Rights, Community Organizing, and Policy Leaders**

Moderated by Marc D. Bayard, Associate Fellow and Director of the Black Worker Initiative, Institute for Policy Studies

Deepak Bhargava, Executive Director, Center for Community Change

Luz Vega-Marquis, President and CEO, Marguerite Casey Foundation

Peter Williams, Executive Vice President of Programs, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP)

2:15 pm **Panel: #BlackWorkersMatter: The State of Black Worker Organizing in the U.S.**

Moderated by Professor Dorian Warren, Columbia University and MSNBC Contributor

Jennifer Epps-Addison, Executive Director, Wisconsin Jobs Now

Mark Meinster, Campaign Director, Warehouse Workers for Justice

Bishop Dwayne Royster, Executive Director, Philadelphians Organized to Witness Empower and Rebuild (POWER)

Lola Smallwood Cuevas, Founder, Los Angeles Black Worker Center

Sean Thomas-Breitfeld, Co-Director, Building Movement Project and lead author of #BlackWorkersMatter

3:45 pm **Closing Remarks**

Speaker Biographies

Marc Bayard is an Associate Fellow and the director of the Institute for Policy Studies' Black Worker Initiative. He was the founding executive director of the Worker Institute at Cornell University. He is a frequent speaker and social commentator for a number of institutions and organizations, and a leading expert on racial equity and organizing strategies with extensive experience in building partnerships between labor, faith groups, and civil rights communities. Marc's dedication to achieving just and humane treatment for workers worldwide is grounded in his firsthand work and experiences in nearly 50 countries. From 2003 to 2011 he was the Africa Regional Program Director for the American Center for International Labor Solidarity, AFL-CIO, and was recently a fellow with the Kalmanovitz Initiative for Labor and the Working Poor at Georgetown University.

Marc holds master's degrees from Cornell University and Georgetown University and is a highly regarded scholar of labor politics. He is the author of the forthcoming biography *Standing Together in Service: William Lucy, Civil Rights and the American Labor Movement* (University of Illinois Press).

Deepak Bhargava has for the last 13 years served as the executive director of the Center for Community Change, a social justice organization that empowers low-income people and people of color. He joined CCC in 1994, serving first as director of public policy before becoming executive director in 2002. Bhargava has stewarded the organization's pioneering work to support and grow the immigrant rights movement, including the successful campaign to achieve major executive action. During his tenure, CCC has also helped its partner organizations strengthen their leadership and civic engagement capacity and contributed to significant policy change in areas such as healthcare, retirement security, affordable housing, improved refundable tax credits for low-income families, and access to good, family-sustaining jobs.

Deepak immigrated to the United States from India as a child, grew up in the Bronx (go Yankees!), and currently resides in New York City with his partner Harry Hanbury.

Marcellus Blount has taught at Columbia since 1985, where he teaches American and African-American literary and cultural studies. He has held fellowships at the Carter G.

Woodson Institute at University of Virginia, the University of Pennsylvania where he was a Rockefeller Fellow, and Harvard University at the W. E. B. Du Bois Institute. More recently he was the Sterling Brown '22 Visiting Professor of English at Williams College. His articles have appeared in a range of journals, including *PMLA* and *Callaloo*. He co-edited *Representing Black Men* and, more recently, has completed "Listening for My Name: African American Men and the Politics of Friendship." His current project is a study of issues related to race and marriage equality.

Kimberly Freeman Brown is president of KFB Consulting, LLC, a boutique management consulting firm that supports some of the foremost progressive leaders, advocates, and political organizations in the nation. Clients including the Advancement Project, the Center for Working Families, and Demos have utilized her expertise on organizational development and leadership development initiatives, and as an executive coach. Prior to launching the firm in 2012, she served as executive director of American Rights at Work, a national labor policy organization that merged with Jobs with Justice in 2012. On occasion, Brown returns to her roots as a writer and communications strategist. Her commentaries have appeared in USA Today, Bloomberg, and other major dailies across the country. She has also appeared on Fox Business and CNBC and been a guest on numerous radio programs. Most recently, Brown authored the report *And Still I Rise: Black Women Labor Leaders' Voices, Power and Promise*, which was released by the Institute for Policy Studies' Black Worker Initiative in May 2015.

Jennifer Epps-Addison is the executive director of Wisconsin Jobs Now, a nonprofit that focuses on improving workers' wages and working conditions. In 2009 she led the charge for Milwaukee's MORE ordinance, which established that 40 percent of all construction jobs on publicly funded projects would go to city residents. Epps-Addison also led a campaign to pass the Milwaukee Jobs Act, which created entry-level construction opportunities for unemployed city residents. Currently, Epps-Addison is leading a coalition of community groups, labor unions, and elected officials who are working to raise wages and standards for Wisconsin workers. She is also the vice president of the Milwaukee Workers Organizing

Committee (MWOC), a recently established low-wage workers union.

Erika Glenn-Byam came to Nontraditional Employment for Women (NEW) straight out of the Air Force, graduated NEW's pre-apprenticeship program in the winter of 2006, and quickly became a laborer within Local 79. At the start of her career, Ms. Glenn-Byam worked for the first three years of her apprenticeship for Breeze Demolition, where she learned the foundation for being a strong laborer at the Plaza Hotel. This began her eight years as a laborer. Her final job as an apprentice was with Setai Hotel with Pavarini McGovern, where one of her favorite foremen helped her establish herself as a company person. Ms. Glenn-Byam has been a mechanic for five years and is currently a shop steward. In 2013 she won a competitive scholarship from NEW to sponsor her journey to the Women Building California and the Nation Conference in Sacramento, California, where she met tradeswomen from around the country and the world. Today Ms. Glenn-Byam is working for Structure Tone Inc., mentoring incoming Local 79 apprentices, helping her mother care for her developmentally disabled brother, and continuing a path toward becoming a site supervisor.

Dr. Luella Toni Lewis has spent her life committed to social justice. As a child, her family taught her that service was the highest form of leadership and that all deserved justice, dignity, and respect. With their support, she pursued a career in social justice through medicine, earning her bachelor's in sociology and medical doctorate from Georgetown University.

In 2004 Dr. Lewis became a family medicine resident and a member of the Committee of Interns and Residents (CIR/SEIU)—the largest physicians' union in the Service Employees International Union (SEIU). She remains active with CIR/SEIU, having served as national president from 2007 to 2010. In 2010 Dr. Lewis was elected international vice president and appointed chair of SEIU Healthcare, the largest division in SEIU, serving 1.1 million healthcare workers in the United States and Canada. Most recently she's led the organization's response to the Ebola crisis and its advocacy for the Affordable Care Act.

Mark Meinster is executive director of Warehouse Workers for Justice, a Chicago-based worker center founded in 2009 to win permanent, living-wage jobs in the logistics and distribution sector. He has led several successful campaigns to hold large retailers accountable for U.S. supply-chain labor

conditions. WWJ grew out of the work of the United Electrical Workers (UE) union, where Meinster worked for 18 years as a union organizer, negotiator, and educator.

Bishop Dwayne D. Royster is POWER's Executive Director and the founding Pastor of Living Water UCC located in Oxford Circle in Northeast Philadelphia. He has served in pastoral ministry for the past 18 years, including in the United Methodist, Mennonite, and Baptist Churches. Bishop Royster also has extensive organizing, social advocacy, and political experience, including serving on the City Council in Norristown in Montgomery County. The Bishop is a graduate of Geneva College's Center for Urban Theological Studies and the Lutheran Theological Seminary in Philadelphia. He was born and raised in Philadelphia.

Lola Smallwood Cuevas currently directs the Los Angeles Black Worker Center (BWC), a project of the UCLA Labor Center and the first worker center in California focused on solving the black job crisis. The BWC aims to build power among black workers to create greater access to quality jobs, address employment discrimination, and transform industries that employ black workers. The BWC grew out of Lola's work coordinating the UCLA African American Leadership School (AALS). As the executive director of the BWC, Lola focuses her work on exploring the role of unions, empowering African American workers in Los Angeles, and strengthening the position of the black working class.

Pierrette "Petee" Talley is Secretary-Treasurer of the Ohio AFL-CIO and the first woman to hold one of the top two offices in the 57-year history of the Ohio AFL-CIO, having been elected for the first time in 2002 and just recently reelected to a fourth 4-year term. Her career began with AFSCME Ohio Council 8 in Toledo where she organized public workers. She held several positions with AFSCME, including as the international union's political and legislative director in Michigan, before being appointed state director of the national AFL-CIO in Ohio in 1999. She serves on several boards in Ohio and is on the National A. Philip Randolph Institute Board, Coalition of Black Trade Unionists International Executive Council as the representative for Region V, and the National Board of the Alliance for Retired Americans.

In addition to serving in her official capacity as chief administrative officer of the Ohio AFL-CIO, she continues her work at the grassroots, organizing community and non-partisan voter mobilization efforts across the state of Ohio.

She volunteers in the capacity of convener of the Ohio Unity Coalition, a coalition of several labor, faith, civil, and human rights organizations with a focus on non-partisan voter registration, voter education, and Get Out The Vote in African American communities across the state.

She is married to Cornell, her spouse of 25 years; they have a blended family of four children and 11 grandchildren. She worships at the Tabernacle Church in Toledo, Ohio.

Sean Thomas-Breitfeld co-directs the Building Movement Project, developing research and tools to bolster nonprofit organizations' potential to support progressive movements. Prior to joining the BMP staff, Sean spent a decade working at the Center for Community Change, where he developed training programs for grassroots leaders and organized on a range of issue campaigns, particularly immigration reform. Sean began his career as a policy analyst in the National Council of La Raza, where he developed research and lobbied on issues related to employment and income security. Sean holds a master's degree in public administration and a bachelor's degree in social work.

Natalicia Tracy is executive director of the Brazilian Worker Center (BWC) in Massachusetts and Connecticut. A former domestic worker, Natalicia co-founded the Massachusetts Coalition for Domestic Workers, which mounted a grassroots campaign that won passage of the Massachusetts Domestic Worker Bill of Rights in June 2014. She is board vice president of the NDWA, a sociology PhD candidate at Boston University, and resident scholar at the Labor Resource Center at the University of Massachusetts Boston. Natalicia has been in the forefront of building alliances between worker centers and organized labor in New England. She has participated in several AFL-CIO Leadership Institutes and is a regular speaker at Massachusetts AFL-CIO and SEIU events. She has also led the BWC in becoming a community affiliate of the Greater Boston Labor Council. In November 2014 she received the Greater Boston Labor Council, AFL-CIO, Leadership Award for her advocacy for domestic workers and the passing of landmark legislation to bring excluded workers out of the shadows.

Luz Vega-Marquis is president and CEO of Marguerite Casey Foundation, where she oversees the foundation's \$700 million endowment and \$35 million grantmaking budget. Ms. Vega-Marquis has positioned the foundation as a leader in movement building by shaping its grantmaking strategies

to support a nationwide movement of low-income families. The foundation provides long-term general-support grants to organizations engaged in activism, advocacy, and issue education in the 14 states with the highest concentration of family poverty. In 2008 the foundation, in partnership with its grantees, launched Equal Voice for America's Families to create a multi-issue family platform that addressed the needs of families across the United States. Equal Voice is now a series of networks working to effect policy change that will ensure the economic well-being of families. Ms. Vega-Marquis has a bachelor's in modern languages from the University of San Francisco and a master's in Latin American studies from Stanford University.

Dorian Warren is an activist, scholar of labor politics, and professor at Columbia University. In the past, he has worked with several organizations, including the Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, American Rights at Work/Jobs with Justice, and the NGLTF Policy Institute. He currently serves on the boards of the Applied Research Center, Center for Community Change, ALIGN, the Model Alliance, the Discount Foundation, and The Nation Magazine Editorial Board. Warren is also a fellow at the Roosevelt Institute. He is a sought-after commentator who frequently appears on networks such as MSNBC, ABC, CNN, NPR, and Bloomberg. In January 2012 he was one of two political contributors for BET's inauguration coverage. Currently, Warren is an MSNBC contributor and can often be seen on Saturday or Sunday mornings on *Melissa Harris-Perry*. Dorian Warren is also the host of MSNBC's online show *Nerding Out*, which airs on Thursdays at 11am.

Susan Wefald became the executive director of the Discount Foundation in June of 2012. Ms. Wefald was previously at the Ms. Foundation for Women for nearly sixteen years, most recently serving as executive vice president & COO, and was responsible for the day-to-day management of the organization. For the first half of her tenure at Ms., she was the senior program officer for economic justice and staffed their Women and Labor Fund, which focused on supporting women's leadership within the organized labor movement and on supporting the connections between community and labor organizing.

Ms. Wefald spent three years as the staff director and lead organizer of the Naugatuck Valley Project, a coalition of unions, churches, and community organizations in Western Connecticut. She also was involved in affordable housing

in New York City as the assistant director of the Urban Homesteading Assistance Board, and is a former adjunct faculty member of the Community Economic Development program of Southern New Hampshire State University, where she taught the course *Community Organizing and Community Economic Development*.

Ms. Wefald co-authored the book *Raise the Floor: Wages and Policies that Work for All of Us*, which presents national minimum-needs budgets for adults and families; proposes a significant increase in the federal minimum wage; and advocates policies to supplement wages so that people can meet their basic needs. She has a long history as an activist on issues related to gender, racial and economic justice, peace, and community development, and has served on numerous nonprofit boards.

Peter M. Williams is the executive vice president of programs for the NAACP. Mr. Williams has solid experience in leading organizations, managing staff, developing and implementing programs, creating strategic alliances, and conducting policy research projects. Before coming to the NAACP, Mr. Williams was the principal of PW Consulting Group, a policy research and management consulting firm that focuses on enhancing the capacity of nonprofit organizations by providing services that include interim executive director management, policy analysis, and strategic planning. He also has served as president and CEO of the Mid-Bronx Desperadoes (MBD) Community Housing Corporation (Bronx, NY); vice

president, School of Continuing Education and Community Programs for Medgar Evers College, City University of New York; deputy advocate for policy and research, Office of the Public Advocate for the City of New York; director of housing and community development, The National Urban League; and legislative assistant to Congressman Edolphus Towns, 10th Congressional District in Brooklyn, New York. He has developed and taught courses in government and policy at Pratt Institute Graduate School of City and Regional Planning and Medgar Evers College.

Mr. Williams served as the first vice president of the NAACP Brooklyn, NY Branch, and has served on a number of corporate and community boards and commissions.

He earned a bachelor of science in criminal justice from Arizona State University and a master's degree in public administration from American University. He also was a Sloan Fellow at the School of Urban and Public Affairs, Carnegie-Mellon University.

Teresa C. Younger is the president and CEO of the Ms. Foundation for Women, the first national fund dedicated to empowering all women. Teresa has been on the frontlines of some of the most important battles for women's rights. She most recently served as the executive director of the Connecticut General Assembly's Permanent Commission on the Status of Women, where she successfully spearheaded campaigns for women's health, safety, and economic empowerment.