BEYOND RECOGNITION:
CONTENDING WITH REGIONAL TENSIONS FOR LONG TERM SOLIDARITY

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ABSTRACT

Linda Markowitz (2000) expanded the concept of a successful union campaign from beyond merely recognition to include post campaign solidarity. While making strides in the study of labor, Markowitz ignores what many others have missed as well, the changing labor market has segregated workers in the same industry across numerous buildings and cities, thus increasing the challenges unions face in building solidarity among members. This, combined with a demographically diverse workforce, and the cleavages that may result, makes union organizing ever more difficult. Even when a union is successful in obtaining recognition, long term solidarity may be at risk if specific demographic groups have unique concerns. This is particularly problematic if local tensions are ignored during the initial organizing drives. To assess these issues, I examine one union campaign spread across two major cities. Through focusing on the two primary locations of a wide spread janitors’ campaign, it becomes apparent that while an important victory was won, union organizers were unaware of concerns that arose from the unique demographics of the city. Specific factors that may influence solidarity after a successful campaign in relation to local demographics allows for a better understanding of the larger movement.
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INTRODUCTION

For a union campaign to be successful, be it a strike or a smaller period of contention such as renegotiating a contract, solidarity is critical (Fantasia 1988). When solidarity is lacking, power is stripped from workers and placed in the hands of the employer. During campaigns, the involvement of workers is by no means static, yet much previous research centers around events leading up the union recognition (Person, Lee, Finnegan 1992; Bronfenbrenner 1993; Johnston 1994). As a result, changes throughout the process as well as the long term consequences have been ignored. As Rick Fantasia has shown in *Cultures of Solidarity* (1988), the creation of solidarity is a fluid process. However, while it is known that changes in solidarity is a process with inherent fluctuations, what is less understood is how solidarity plays out after the conclusion of a campaign. Markowitz (2000) has made strides in this regard, looking pass the recognition and delving into the realm of post campaign challenges. Markowitz recognized that a top down approach is well suited for organizing

Despite the strides made by scholars such as Fantasia and Markowitz, we still know relatively little about solidarity after successful campaigns. Along with the lack of studies that analyze the fluid nature of solidarity after the campaign is another gap in current research. Race has been ignored as a lasting constraint to solidarity. While race has been addressed as a hindrance to solidarity prior and during a campaign, many other analyses have ignored it all together. Those that have explored the realm of race have far
too often ignored the role race plays after the campaign. Instead they have focused on changing immigrant dynamics of labor and the consequences it poses. While focusing on the impacts of race prior and during campaigns, the role race plays after the campaign goes ignored. This problem with the current literature should not be surprising considering the relatively few studies that address campaigns after initial success.

This paper contributes to our understanding of post campaign solidarity and the influence of race. Through analyzing a seemingly successful Justice for Janitors campaign in Columbus and Cincinnati, it becomes clear that solidarity fluctuates and can be affected by racial cleavages. While both cities demonstrated high levels of solidarity that culminated in two successful campaigns, Columbus workers maintained their enthusiasm while the workers of Cincinnati reverted back to pre campaign cleavages. I argue that demographic factors and unions inability to deal with cleavages during the campaign in Cincinnati created a lasting impact on post campaign solidarity. While both cities possessed unique demographic challenges, it was the deliberate actions of union organizers that hampered the demographic challenges in one city but not the other.
CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

**Solidarity**

While the term ‘collective action’ is most commonly used in social movement literature and ‘solidarity’ in work literature, in many ways the two have same meaning and implications. This is due to the fact that research by collective identity scholars and research by solidarity scholars are informed by each other. This overlap has been realized by others who clearly bring in both perspectives to inform their studies (Dixon, Roscigno, Hodson 2004). Similarly, this paper will draw on both schools but refer primarily to solidarity for the purpose of cohesion.

Social movement scholars have long recognized the importance of collective identity. Polletta and Jasper (2001) point out that scholars have dealt with collective identity with four primary questions in mind: Why do actors come together; what motivates individuals to act; how do groups decide what actions to take; and how does collective identity impact institutions? While they correctly note that such questions have inherent gaps, their own solution stops at movement outcomes, ignoring changes in collective identity after success.

Morris (1984) describes how African American churches were vital to the civil rights movement by providing “free space” that was free from the physical control of those in power. Solidarity built in one area can spill over to others. Similar to how
locations may affect attitudes and willingness to be involved in a campaign (Polletta 1999) and strengthen solidarity, so can simply framing of the workers affect solidarity. Sewell (1980) has argued that labels of “worker” or “citizen” have different ramifications in creating solidarity. While some groups may find it useful to use all encompassing terms such as “worker” or “citizen,” other movements have found it useful to utilize a more specific group pride that centers just on that particular group of workers (Breines 1989).

The formation of solidarity or collective identity can also be the result of a sense of obligation based on prior experiences (Marwell and Oliver 1993; Tilly 1978). If workers interact with each other routinely, then friendships or other informal networks may form. Such networks help to create a sense of solidarity through obligation to one another (Dixon and Roscigno 2003). In the case of janitors, this may pose possible difficulty since workers may be spread across not just shifts but also buildings, limiting the interactions between workers and decreasing the potential for informal networks and solidarity to arise. This would clearly pose a challenge to union organizers who may find it necessary to develop innovative means to create networks and solidarity that may arise almost naturally in other work settings. While prior ties can play a large role in establishing solidarity, Minkoff (1997) points out that organizers can attempt to create the network ties that could facilitate the rise of solidarity.

As noted by Chong (1991), people are also constrained by the perceptions of others. If an individual is viewed as an outspoken leader, the individual may feel obligated to continue that role in a union campaign. Those who do not carry such a role prior to the campaign have less pressure to adopt such a role during the campaign, posing
yet another challenge to the union organizers attempt to create solidarity. Polletta and Jasper (2001: 292) state it well when they say “any social movement group must continually manage its collective identities, and even identities predating movements are subjected to reconstruction.” Solidarity is a long term and fluid process that constantly changes and interacts with various identities.

**Solidarity, Collective Identity and Racial/Ethnic Cleavages**

Race has played an important role in labor history and will continue to do so. Race relations have historically played a large role in labor relations. Unfortunately social movement literature has largely ignored the importance. Brown and Boswell (1995) argue that “the cost of migrant minority compliance is relatively higher due to the primacy of their immediate economic interests.” The researchers claim that migrant minority groups are less likely to show signs of solidarity and defect in order to obtain immediate yet short term gains as opposed to long term advantages. However, they recognize that in such situations where the union is racially heterogeneous, the strength of the union plays a vital role in the development of worker compliance. An earlier study by Boswell (1986) suggests that minority groups are likely to be used as strikebreakers in part because of discrimination that pushes them into lower paying jobs. In fact, African Americans and unskilled workers were once excluded from some unions (Dickerson 1986). Employers were able to use race issues and disparities as means to recruit them as strikebreaker with some African American leaders and organizations going as far as encouraging African Americans to serve as strikebreakers (Brown and Boswell 1995).

Even when organizations like the AFL and the National Committee for Organizing Iron and Steel Workers set out to encourage the unionization of African
Americans, segregation and even exclusion took place at the local level (Brody 1965). While such dynamics are less likely to occur today, with some studies actually indicating that African Americans are more attune to class consciousness (Rief et al 1985), it is still important to take note of race issues since they have historically been utilized by bosses to decrease solidarity among workers. The importance of race as an interference to class consciousness is by no means a recent discovery. It has been discussed in detail by Marx (1861) and more recently by O’Brien (2008).

Further gaps in solidarity literature exist in terms of immigrants and race. While labor once was adhering to restrictionism, this has become less of the case for today. The AFL had once placed its focus on craft unionism, paying less attention to industrial unionism. The logic behind such behavior was that the craft industry required a greater amount of skill and as such the workers would have a great amount of leverage over business, in the process being able to advance the labor movement. The CIO however took a more inclusive approach, and would eventually combine with the AFL in the mid 1980’s, changing the face of labor to a more heterogeneous composition that included a greater number of immigrants (Haus 1995).

Previous labor concerns on the issue dealt in part with the fear that American jobs would be lost to foreigners abroad. However, with the declining industrial sector and the fear that lower skilled jobs will be sent overseas, it is thought that unions must support openness to prevent the departure of jobs to other countries (Haus 1995). Other unions have followed suit, recognizing the greater role of immigrant labor in the American work force and as such the American labor movement. One large union for example, the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), which
passed a resolution stating the need to organize immigrants, is clearly moving away from labors old restrictionist path and now adopting a more nonrestrictionist perspective. Realizing that the issue of immigration was a hot button and could be used by bosses to instill fear into workers and thereby prevent them from joining or supporting a union, unions such as the United Food and Commercial Workers Union (UFCWU), International Ladies Garment Workers Union (ILGWU), Service Employees International Union (SEIU) and United Farm Workers (UFW) sought to promote amnesty programs so that employers would be less likely to utilize threats of calling the INS, (now known as the USCIS) to break up union campaigns (Haus 1995). Despite the efforts of unions to obtain amnesty in order to broaden its base as well as protect workers from threats, their efforts have as of yet been short of successful. As a result, it is reasonable to speculate that some workers may be unwilling to actively support a union campaign not due to lack of support for the union but instead because of fear of reprisal. This, of course, may have long term implications for movement solidarity.

It has been argued that solidarity often arises due to collective interests or even individual incentives (Tilly 1978; McAdam 1982). In the case of inter racial solidarity, incentives are still necessary but may be more complex (McAdam, McCarthy and Zald 1988). Although work has been done in analyzing solidarity across racial lines, many have not ventured past analysis of African American and white relations (Brueggemann and Boswell 1998; Neckerman, Carter and Lee 1999; Nelson 1996). Those that do consider solidarity among more than just whites and African Americans still limit themselves to how new immigrants impact the wages and employment of well established immigrants (Bean and Bellrose 1999; Waldinger 1996). One exception is
Foersters (2004) study of a New York union that successfully built solidarity among workers of diverse racial backgrounds. Organizational structure and history allowed for the union of 15,000 members to incorporate new minorities with minimal difficulty. However, what should be done when a union is starting from scratch in a new region? Such a question is essential to creating not just campaign success but long term solidarity for future success. While many possibilities exist, this paper will soon discuss what did and did not work in a multi city and multi racial Justice for Janitors campaign.

**A Brief History**

In 2005, SEIU broke away from the AFL-CIO. While the move has allowed the union to progress in its organizing, it has no doubt also benefited from the history of AFL and the conditions that make it unique from the CIO.

The CIO experienced much of its growth following the creation of the NLRA and New Deal policies, both of which allowed the CIO to grow with relative ease and without tough union campaigns. Having formed prior to the NLRA and the New Deal, the AFL was well acquainted with struggling for union recognition under less than favorable conditions, although at times this was done through questionable means. The union recognition procedures implemented through the establishment of the NLRA in 1935 allowed the CIO to work from within the structure, while AFL was well aquatinted with organizing prior to the NLRA. While the SEIU and its Justice for Janitors campaign has certainly progressed and adopted newer tactics, it has none the less benefited from the struggles faced decades ago (Brofenbrenner et al. 1998).
Justice For Janitors Today

After Sweeney’s historic election in 1995, a call was made to increase organizing attempts. However, few unions took major strides in reinvigorating their organizing campaign. SEIU was one of the few unions that attempted to push forward with organizing new workers (Milkman and Voss 2004). The Justice for Janitors campaign in California was one such SEIU attempt and garnered widespread attention for its success, including the film Bread and Roses. The successes of Justice for Janitors has been accredited to several factors including its use of house visits, face to face organizing, member involvement, and analysis of local economic conditions in order to pursue a “wage out of competition” strategy (Williams 1999; Savage 1998).

Preston Rudy (2004) has argued that much of the success of the Justice of Janitors campaign and unions in general stems from the political context. Justice for Janitors repeatedly take risks, using the connections workers have with the larger community to sway political leaders. Such a method is in line with Pivon and Cloward (2000) who have argued that political disruption can create leverage. In the campaigns studied in this paper, political context proved to be important. Typical of a successful Justice for Janitors campaign, organizers and workers joined with community organizations to pressure bosses and political leaders. However, the cases reveal details that have gone ignored in other studies. Political context extends beyond simply the political leaders of an area but is also a factor of the demographics of the region. Milkman (2000, 2006) has touched upon demographics in terms of immigrants in the labor movement, focusing on the strides that have been made but in the process misses the cleavages that can still exist.
even after a successful campaign. Brief mention of such cleavages is made by Fisk, Miitchell and Erickson (2000), yet the issue is glossed over and relegated as a by product of an internal dispute with little broader implication. O’Brien (2008) recognizes how race and other issues of identity can affect solidarity but, like most studies, fails to extend beyond successful campaigns. Strides have been made on several fronts but a cohesive unity is still lacking.

AFL has not been without its critics. Early (2004) has made mention of the business unionism inherent in much of AFL’s history as well as today. Campaigns have been run from above, with little worker involvement. Some affiliates have been accused of being overly conservative, such as the Teamsters. Rather than empowering workers and supporting their attempts to organize with a union, Teamsters have sidetracked workers and dealt directly with employers. At times this has been done without gaining worker support, forcing employers to recognize the union by making the cost of resisting greater than the cost of capitulating (Brody 2005; Russell 2001).

Despite criticism for business unionism and the top down approach often associated with it, Milkman (2006) suggests that it is not necessarily negative. Neither a top down nor a bottom up approach is sufficient. A combination of the two is preferable, with the trained skill of organizers combining with the informed will of the workers, marching side by side with neither union nor worker leading the charge. Yet, this ideal image may not necessarily be the status quo. Many would argue that union participation and lack there of is reminiscent of Michels (1962) Iron Law. Unions of the 70’s and 80’s have been criticized as being dominated by business unionism that acts to serve members rather than empower them. The effect of such is not simply that workers lack direct say
in the work force but workers may also lose confidence in unions and blame unions rather than employers for troubles (Moody 2007; Lopez 2007).

The SEIU and its Justice for Janitors campaign has not been free of similar critiques. Early (2004) and Savage (2006) imply an undemocratic nature behind the movement. The AFL, as with the CIO, has reserved the right to interfere in the affairs of its local affiliates to push its organizing agenda. The SEIU has done exactly this, tossing out union leaders at times. However, this seemingly undemocratic behavior actually ensured greater worker participation by removing proponents of business unionism behavior and installing organizers that implemented a more worker involved social movement approach. The success of SEIU in the 80’s and 90’s have been accredited to precisely this type of approach, where outsiders are utilized rather than adhering to an outdated business approach (Voss and Sherman 2000). This case allows me to examine the role local racial cleavages affect solidarity after a successful campaign and the role played for organizers.
METHODS

Justice for Janitors illustrates the innovative strategies SEIU has taken in dealing with the challenges facing labor. Similar to UNITE-HERE, SEIU, through its Justice for Janitors campaign, attempts to organize those that were once perceived as unable to be organized. The campaign has garnered great success over the years and has become a model of success and a demonstration of the need to organize immigrants (Milkman 2000, 2006). This study looks at a unique Justice for Janitors campaign that did not isolate itself to just one city. In doing so, a unique opportunity is presented. When one local organizes multiple cities in a unique and integrated yet separate campaign, it becomes clear how the demographics of each city can come to affect the perceptions of the workers and how the union responds. While both Columbus and Cincinnati were cities with racial cleaves both were successful in their campaigns. However, solidarity persisted in Columbus and not Cincinnati due to unique organizing tactics used in the respective cities. Through observations and interviews with organizers, and more importantly workers, it becomes possible to explain why the two cities differed in terms of solidarity following the successful campaigns.

With the states largest university housed here as well as many government agencies, Columbus serves as one of the states hubs. According to the 2000 census, over 1.5 million residents resided in this metro area, nearly 200,000 more than 1990. Of the
2000 population, the non-Hispanic\textsuperscript{1} white population is by far the majority, at over 1.2 million. The Hispanic population was slightly under 30,000 while the non-Hispanic black population far greater at over 200,000. With the Hispanic and non-Hispanic Black being a mere 1.8% and 14.2% of the population respectively, the non-Hispanic White dominates with 80.4% of the population. While demographic information for the bargaining unit is not available, organizers recognized that many of the janitors are black and Hispanic. The large black population is in part due to migration from Somalia. Facing political turmoil, two waves of immigration occurred the first being in the early 1980’s and the later starting in the mid-1990s. To date, it is estimated that over 40,000 Somalis reside in and around Columbus. With such a large Somali population, during the past presidential campaign, SEIU hired Somali organizers in order to reach out to this community. As will be seen, an attempt to reach out to the Somali population also occurred during the struggle for union recognition.

Located in the same state, Cincinnati has somewhat similar demographics on the surface. The overall population of Cincinnati was slightly over 1.6 million according to the 2000 census. Similar to Columbus, over 83% of the population is non-Hispanic White. Hispanics and non-Hispanic Blacks are just over 1% and 13% respectively. At first glance, these basic demographics would appear to be similar to Columbus; however, a number of differences are present. Most notably is the origin of the African American population. Whereas much of the Black population in Columbus is the result of Somali and to a lesser extent Ethiopian migration, the Black population of Cincinnati has deeper

\textsuperscript{1} While demographic data often refers to Hispanics, when not referring to census data this paper will opt to use the term Latino. This is done because Latino is more inclusive in that it does not imply a connection to Spain and the language. Latino was also the term most commonly used among workers themselves.
roots\textsuperscript{2}. Cincinnati was once a border city between states that allowed slavery and those that did not. With race riots occurring as far back as 1829 and as recently as 2001, the city has seen more than its share of racial tensions. Current hostilities have found catalyst in a variety of issues, such as police brutality. With a recent influx of Somali migration it is conceivable that the new migrants would be used as scapegoats in Columbus, as has often been done throughout US history. Why such racial cleavages did not present themselves, despite ample opportunity for them to have, is one of the puzzles of this unique multi-city campaign.

While Cincinnati is home to many Fortune 500 companies, similar to many mid-west cities, it was dealt a devastating blow by deindustrialization. Recent efforts have been made to revitalize the economy and creation of jobs through ambitious construction projects. The most recent project, as we will see, has presented new fuel to the already existing racial tensions.

Rather than take a building by building organizing approach, the locals chose to pursue an industry wide approach in both cities. If each building was organized separately, it was feared that not only would the process be far lengthier, but it would also make it easy to simply hire a new non-union company. Likewise, if a single janitorial company was unionized, a building owner could simply hire a non-union provider. By targeting all the primary companies at once, the entire industry would be reshaped in each city. Due to the distance between Columbus and Cincinnati, over 100 miles, and the fact that each city has different providers of janitorial providers, the campaigns in each city

\textsuperscript{2} Black is used when referring to demographic numbers and when referring to the general black population. In other cases, Somalis will be referred to as Somali and non-Somali blacks will be referred to as African American. This is meant as a way to clearly distinguish between two unique black populations.
were run separately. While the slogan of the multi-city campaign did proclaim it to be one struggle, it was decided for strategic purposes to start the campaign in each city at different times. The strategy was a success, with the end of negotiations in Cincinnati being followed closely by recognition in Columbus.
RESULTS

Columbus and Cincinnati were made up of workers of diverse racial backgrounds with race a possible point of contention in both campaigns. While both campaigns succeeded with signs of strong solidarity during the campaign, it was only in Columbus that the sense of solidarity appeared to remain. Cincinnati workers reverted back to previous race identities and cleavages. The primary difference that insured demographic cleavages would not hamper union solidarity in Columbus was union tactics that were not present in Cincinnati.

While in many ways the call for recognition started in 2003 in Columbus, it was actually in Cincinnati that the successful multi-city campaign was announced. Not by coincidence, Cincinnati was also the first city of the campaign to sign contracts with all of the major janitorial service providers. The city had clear social problems that aided the formation of solidarity among workers. High unemployment and a dwindling local economy were certainly of concern. Yet, at the same time, workers were angered by the clear disparity that existed within the city. Will, an organizer in Cincinnati recounted:

“You have incredibly wealthy commercial office building owners, most of whom are Fortune 500 or Fortune 1000 companies, and it’s mostly African American, people of color who are cleaning their buildings for peanuts.”

Similar sentiments were shared by workers themselves. Of the ten workers interviewed in Cincinnati, all mentioned wealth discrepancies in one manner or
another. This should come as little surprise considering one of the primary demands of the union was increased pay.

Perhaps more enlightening than the wealth disparities that were recognized by workers and organizers alike is Will’s focus on the African American community. While in his earlier statement, Will implied that the differences were between whites and people of color, he specifically mentioned African Americans, and in doing so, left out the Latino population. This was repeated once again when Will reiterated the cities wealth disparity by stating:

“And it’s predominantly African American and many of the janitors live there so there’s this strange scenario where you had very, very poor workers walk from Over-the-Rhine in the downtown Cincinnati, from extreme poverty into extreme wealth, and also coming home each night with nothing in their pockets”

While the difference played a minimal role during the campaign, as we will see, it is a hidden factor that had profound consequences after the campaign was won

When entering the bargaining process, Cincinnati went to the table with the support of 60% of the workers, a large enough majority to ensure successful bargaining. However, Columbus went to the bargaining table with 87%. While recognition in Columbus may have come after Cincinnati, it was the result of a strategic choice to have wide spread support in combination with the success of Cincinnati. Collective action does not automatically translate into collective identity or solidarity. While Cincinnati showed more signs of collective action in the form of rallies and strikes, it was out of necessity and not lasting solidarity. Columbus may not have required as many shows of collective action, but their high approval rating demonstrates a higher level of solidarity than in Cincinnati.
If concerned only with quickness to recognition and level of collective action during a campaign, Cincinnati would certainly be considered superior to Columbus. However, the growth of the labor movement and its long term success requires a deeper understanding. It requires us to extend our vantage point to beyond recognition. Both cities had racial differences and both cities succeeded at nearly the same time. While signs of solidarity were present in both cities, lasting solidarity is most evident in Columbus. The different levels of solidarity are the result of different tactics used by the locals.

*Racial Cleavages in Cincinnati*

From the first phone conversation with Hector, it was clear that a divide was taking place in Cincinnati. Without realizing it, Hector had opened my eyes to a situation that I was unaware of and organizers either ignored or were also unaware of. “I don’t know how much help I’ll be. I can only give the Latino perspective.” Despite the success of the campaign and end of negotiations, interpretations on how well the campaign went varied not simply between workers and organizers but also between races. Hector’s words would be reiterated in various forms from other janitors.

While Hector was not a union organizer or even one of the janitors fighting for union representation, he was well aware of the racial tensions that persisted. As a community organizer that served on the board of The Joel Plan, a fluctuating coalition of over one dozen churches of various denominations that sought social justice in and round the city, Hector had become aware of the how the Latino community felt neglected.

“But they want all the jobs, all the thousands of job, they want a percentage that the black community would have access to those jobs.”

-Hector, Latino, Community Organizer
With the city facing hard times, measures had been taken in hopes of inviting new companies into the city. One such case is Liberty Square, a new development that would potentially create hundreds of jobs. With the success of the Justice of Janitors campaign, the janitors in the Liberty Square would be unionized under SEIU. While positive in many respects, perhaps unknown to union organizers, local politics were at play. While Latinos made up much of the janitors in the bargaining party, their political clout in the city was weak. With many choosing or not being able to vote, the African American community received the attention of politicians who attempted to provide jobs in exchange for political backing.

“The politicians are based on votes, they want votes. Joel Plan go there and say, ‘We have 5,000 votes.’ That’s how they always tell you, ‘Between five and ten thousand votes, that could go for your campaign, in favor or you, to vote, if you do this project, if you back us, if you support us, in the project. Give us a high percentage of those jobs that are gonna be there, for the black community, and you will have the promise of votes to the candidate for the governor of Ohio’, and that’s how it works, they put pressure on the politicians.”
-Hector, Latino, Community Organizer

The city has had a long history of a racial divide. Over the years numerous racial strains have been placed on the city. A race riot broke out in the early part of the decade and was still fresh in the minds of many. The shooting of an African American individual by a white officer shook the city. Yet despite the historical race relations of the city being between whites and African Americans, it was the Latino community that was the most dissatisfied by the outcome of the campaign. While African Americans and white were well aware of the tensions that underlined much of the every day interactions of the city, they felt it played little in the Justice for Janitors campaign.

“It aint like I’m a chill with them (white coworkers) before comin in but that’s just what it is. Nothing against them. Like Charlie is nice and all but its known that things are different outside of work”
-Jack, African American, Janitor
“Work is work but its not life. At work, at meetings its one thing. Going home to our block, it’s a different thing. The same things don’t go over the way. Its just the reality of how things are. In the union (events) its fine…side by side ya know. Friends and all laugh and have fun but go home and we all got our own lives.”
-Charlie, White, Janitor

“When it came to the campaign, it don’t matter. Can be purple for all I care. We were there for a purpose. We had demands and we stood together for them. Yea you know it can be different outside of it all but come work it aint nothing. Want the same things, right.
-Blaire, African American, Janitor

Through the interviews, responses had a common theme. Work and life were two separate spheres. The goal of increased wages, better benefits and proper working conditions united everybody towards the purpose of forming a union. However, the solidarity created through rallies, protest, strikes and other union activities did not necessarily trickle down into the everyday lives of African American and white workers. While this held true for Latino workers as well, they experienced an added strain. While still supportive of the union many were aware that the political climate was not favoring them. Rumors of African Americans receiving higher wages and faster promotions were abound. Of the four Latinos interviewed, two mentioned the rumors on their own. Upon being asked about the rumors the remaining two acknowledged hearing the rumors and felt there was some truth to them. The primary area of distain was towards Liberty Square and the possibility that African Americans would purposefully be given jobs at the expense of Latinos. The anger and resentment that came from the schism was not targeted towards the union but rather the leaders of both the African American and Latino communities.

“I don’t think union knew. Between politicians and the leaders. Latinos are poor here and many don’t vote. We can’t say hey we have 500 votes for you if you help us out but they (African American leaders) can. Our leaders come say one thing to us, “its okay we’ll take care of it” and never do and then go make deals without telling us. I think they make deals to help themselves.”
-Javier, Latino, Janitor
“He (Will) talked about being together and its fine. They (the union) cared and do what can but some they cant. Like the Liberty Square and they don’t know. They don’t know that only politicians want votes and we have some but not enough.”
-Juan, Latino, Janitor

A triangle of differences persisted. While African Americans and whites have historically been at odds, this larger concern of the city affected little of the day to day solidarity attempts of the union. However, they did prevent lasting solidarity from developing. Tensions between the Latino and African American community clearly took a different form than that of African Americans and Whites. Latinos, although not vocal about their concern to the union, felt that they were being neglected not by the union but by leaders and politicians that attempted to create new jobs. One may expect similar tensions between Latinos and Whites, yet no evidence presented itself. While one interviewee (Clark, white, janitor) did suggest that Latinos should be promoted less and make less since they don’t speak English and don’t work as hard, such a comment appeared to be an anomaly and not representative of the larger pool of white respondents.

“I was present primarily for contract negotiations so its difficult for me to say. From what I saw, it wasn’t an issue. If anything it was the opposite with immigrants and blacks and white together. Everybody knew what was at stake and had the same goals. The whole community stood with the campaign regardless of race or religion.”
-Rick, SEIU Negotiator

While workers made it abundantly clear that race issues were at play, issues of racial contention were not addressed by union organizers. Ambivalence existed in which organizers felt that race relations were positive when in reality they were no different than the city as a whole. Workers saw the benefit of having a union in terms of how they would personally benefit rather than how the group would. Viewing the advantage in individualistic terms created enough passion to have successful rallies and strikes. However, such passion is short lived once individual goals are obtained.
“Everybody has a reason and sometimes they don’t know the reason. For me it was pay cause I know I work like mad but aint no way I can live just off of this. For another it may be hours or like respect.”
-Charlie, Worker, White

With the recognition of SEIU as the bargaining party and a new contract signed, there was little motivation for workers to continue their activism in Cincinnati. The regular monthly meetings became increasingly sporadic and with less attendance. While observing a meeting would have certainly provided a wealth of information, equally as telling is the fact that I was unable to attend local meetings due to them being postponed and cancelled on more than one occasion.

“I heard of one I think but didn’t go. (Why?) Just busy. I mean when everything was going on I would go here and there but its over now. Will knows what he’s doing”
-Thomas, White, Worker

“Got more than I thought. I’m liking the contract for sure. My pay is going up and I know they cant just make me do what they want to make me do if its not in the contract”
-Justin, African American, Worker

With the campaign having come to an end, workers in Cincinnati felt that their goals were achieved. Having united mostly for individual goals, the end of the campaign coincided with the end of unity. The situation was worsened by the fact that racial cleavages went ignored by union organizers. This was in sharp contrast to Columbus where social events still took place. Although attendance was sparse, the existence of such events demonstrated a lasting group solidarity even after the achievement of a contract. Workers of all races were enthusiastic not simply about having won a campaign, but also about the changes that were to come.

*Columbus – Race as a Unifier*

Historically, race has not served as a unifier. Instead, it has been used to pit worker against worker. Italians, Asians, Latinos, African Americans and Whites have all
been negatively affected by racial cleavages that spill into the work place. The lack of solidarity due to racial cleavages was clearly present in Cincinnati. Considering the influx of Somali immigrants to Columbus one may expect to find cleavages similar to those proposed in split labor market theory. However, such cleavages aren’t present in Columbus. On the contrary, workers of different races got along surprisingly well. The fact that Columbus did not present clear race tensions the way Cincinnati did goes a long way in indicating the higher level of solidarity among workers relative to Cincinnati.

While Cincinnati had long standing racial tensions that maneuvered covertly behind the scenes of the Justice for Janitors campaign, Columbus faced a unique set of local concerns. Since the early 90’s Columbus took in thousands of Somali refugees. With 18,000 Somalis, the city jockeys with Minneapolis for the largest Somali population in the United States. The Islamic Society of North America (ISNA) puts the number as high as 40,000 when counting the surrounding cities and townships. While one could envision a scenario playing out similar to that of Cincinnati, where jobs are rumored to be given to one racial group at the expense of another, this did not occur in Columbus. The differences in many cases served to unite rather than divide many workers. Organizers made an active effort in reaching out to the Somali population and used the unique experiences of the population to garner wide spread solidarity.

Among other strategies, one of the lead organizers learned Somali in order to better communicate with this niche of workers. Even if not fully fluent, the attempt and knowledge of the basic components of the language may serve to demonstrate to Somali workers that the union truly did care. The comfort Somali workers felt with the union is most evident not simply by their attendance at union social events but more importantly
that they brought their own children to the gatherings. This was the result of organizers purposeful attempt to reach out to the Somali workforce, connecting their struggle with the larger union struggle.

“Religion was a real big one, because some of the companies had supervisors and stuff that weren’t providing a good place for Muslims to go pray. There were a couple incidents where they were, made them have to pray in the back, which is not cool at all. And then some of them were just told they couldn’t do it at all. There was no place for you to go, so you couldn’t do it, which is wrong.”
- Bill, White, Worker

“Yea, Julia told me about that. I wasn’t there or nothing but I head about it. They like took the scarf away and didn’t give a choice but just took it cause they could.”
- Ryan, Latino, Worker

It was well recognized that Somali Muslims were treated differently. The difference in treatment, as indicated in Bill and Ryan statements, was not from fellow workers but by supervisors. It is unclear how wide spread the discrimination was. What is clear is that it struck a cord with several workers. In line with the mantra, “an attack on one is an attack on all,” workers used the prejudice against Muslims as a uniting point. In the prejudice they not only saw an attack on a fellow worker but also part of a bigger concern that faced all workers. Soon after mentioning the discrimination faced by Somali workers, Jacob spoke of the changes that have occurred since the union was recognized:

When it comes to taking safety precautions, like gloves, goggles, face masks, instead of you going into a work situation where you gotta use a heavy chemical, and you’re like ‘ok I need some gloves, I need a mask. I need safety goggles for my eyes’ and they’re like ‘oh you don’t need that’, or ‘we don’t have it’, they can’t do that anymore with the union being present; because now they have to follow a certain criteria, certain safety criteria
- Jacob, Black, Worker

Nearly all of those interviewed in Columbus mentioned the discrimination facing Somalis and workers. Two examples of discrimination and ill treatment were mentioned repeatedly, not simply by organizers but by African American, white, Somali and Latino workers. While all of the African American, white and Latino workers made mention of
such stories only two of the four Somali workers mentioned similar stories. The fact that a large number of workers not only had knowledge of the same stories but also referred to them during discussions suggests that the stories were more than a tale. They were part of the organizing repertoire. They were used to forge a sense of solidarity, with workers finding a common concern and point of unity regardless of race.

Organizers in Columbus created a sense of solidarity with workers through another tactic as well. In conjunction with using stories as a point of unity and the lead organizer learning parts of the language, the local actually went as far as hiring Somalis to help with the organizing. This was done in part with SEIU’s support of the Democratic Party during the 2008 presidential election and the need to reach out to specific populations. It was also a powerful tool in making the Somali population feel welcomed as part of the union. The diversity of Columbus workers was shadowed by the diversity of the SEIU staff in Columbus. The paid staff was Latino, Somali and white, with African Americans also serving as volunteers. While much of those on the payroll were hired to participate in the 2008 presidential election, their diversity may have served to prevent racial tensions among workers.

Nasra was a paid staff member for SEIU in Columbus. At social gatherings it was clear that she made an active effort in welcoming all workers and helping to make Somalis more comfortable. Such effort is vital when considering that many of the Somali workers spoke broken English and were too shy to interact with others without the support of Nasra and others. This acceptance of the union is demonstrated not only by the number of cards signed but also their willingness to work for the union, come to social events with family and their vocalization of support during interviews.
In an industry where workers are spread across the city in different buildings and different floors, creating a sense of solidarity requires extra effort on the part of the union. In Columbus, organizers were able to bridge the inherent physical as well as racial differences between workers through the use of stories that created bonds across races, learning the language and hiring of Somali workers to reach out to the community, and social events that allowed workers to communicate outside of an isolating workplace.

During a union BBQ in Columbus, signs of solidarity were clearly present. Not only were Whites, Latinos, African Americans and Somalis all present at the gathering, there were no distinct cliques. Everybody conversed and enjoyed their time together. There were those who talked about music and work while attending the grill. Others remained inside enjoying their drinks and food as they talked about their different work experiences and plan for the future. A Somali gentleman even brought four of his children to the event with him, indicating clear signs of comfort with the union and fellow workers. Although shy, perhaps due to a slight language barrier, he was smiling and enjoying himself. After an initial shy and perhaps isolate period, he too was talking with other workers as his children talked and played. Conversations varied widely throughout the afternoon, changing periodically and ranging from work to family life. As opposed to the racial cleavages of Cincinnati, a clear comfort existed among Columbus workers.

Social activities were not isolated to the Columbus union house. SEIU organizers and workers also attended social events on their own time. In once instance, workers and organizers enjoyed their off time by attending trivia night at a local bar. The group was large enough that they had to split into two separate teams. Those present
were once again white, African American and Latino. While no Somalis attended, this was most likely due to the fact that many Somalis are Muslims and Muslims are not permitted to drink due to religious beliefs. While Somalis did not attend the bar trivia nights, they did attend a winter party that occurred several weeks later. This indicates that they felt comfortable with the union, even bringing children to the party.

During the gathering in winter, workers of all races once again participated. This time, even more children were present, happily playing with gifts. This was not an event attended by workers of any one race or religion but instead consisted of whites, Latinos, African Americans and Somalis as well as Christians and non-Christians. The event, as was the case in other union sponsored events, appeared less as a union activity and more as a gathering of friends. Not only did they talk among themselves, workers also talked and entertained each other children. A clear comfort exists among workers. Unlike in Cincinnati, solidarity was not isolated just to the campaign or even work. In sharp contrast, Columbus workers showed signs of unity not only after the success of their campaign but also out of the work place.

Cincinnati successfully won recognition but solidarity quickly decreased afterwards due to racial cleavages. One would expect similar lack of solidarity in Columbus given the racial diversity and new immigrant population that could easily be used as a local scapegoat. However, solidarity remained even after the success of the campaign in Columbus. While antagonisms surfaced in Cincinnati, worker interactions and solidarity persisted in Columbus.
DISCUSSION

Two key differences existed between Columbus and Cincinnati. Both were successful in obtaining contracts for workers across the city but only Columbus shows strong signs of lasting solidarity. However, contracts are never final. They require alterations and negotiations every few years. When workers lack a united front, the end of a contract may serve to also be end the union. For the long term success of a local to be safe guarded, it is best for solidarity to be present not only during an initial recognition campaign but also remain powerful for renegotiations. While it is too early to know how the levels of solidarity in Columbus and Cincinnati will affect their future negotiations, it is clear that two key differences have affected the amount of solidarity present at the end of the successful campaigns.

While both cities had a diverse worker population, Cincinnati had an added dilemma of working with a history of racial tensions. This is not to say that Columbus was void of any possible tensions. Although not a reoccurring theme, two Somali workers and one African American worker mentioned differences between the two groups. A clash of cultures existed in which some in the Somali community did not view African American blacks as truly African. They were simply blacks that had become American. The African heritage was lost. While African Americans did not necessarily view it in these terms, still proud of their African roots, some of those in the Somali
community felt that they were truly African while others had lost what it meant to be African. This point could have been an area of contention, dividing two groups of black workers, yet it did not. While it was brought up as a view held by many in the community, it was brought up by only three workers and in passing. Perhaps an issue of concern before the campaign, during and after the campaign such differences had become mute. This may not be the case for the community at large but certainly was where workers are concerned.

Both cities faced their own challenges brought on by demographic cleavages. Both were diverse and had underlining areas of contention that were existent prior to the campaign. While both campaigns were successful, only one was able to overcome the cleavages in a lasting manner, a strength that will benefit the union when it will be time to negotiate a new contract. Organizers in Columbus took special effort in ensuring the minority group, Somalis, felt included in the organizing processes. Equally important, the use of stories ensured that non-Somalis could relate their experience and struggles as one unified front.

The case of Cincinnati demonstrated that politics can be a hindrance developing solidarity. This corresponds with previous research which has found that diverse populations may struggle to develop strong political bonds due to race (Sugrue 1995; Gouldner 2003). Union tactics and structure have a profound influence on worker attitude towards the union and solidarity with each other (Bronfenbrenner and Juravich 1996). While organizers in Cincinnati were ambivalent to strong racial tensions among the ranks and as such did little to combat it, organizers in Columbus preemptively
ensured racial cleavages would not hinder the campaign. Remarkably they were able to use the unique experiences as a point of unity.

Research is conflicting on the amount of solidarity among workers of different backgrounds. Identities of race and gender can serve as barrier to working class solidarity (Peak and Radcliff 1995; Form 1985). The distinction between solidarity and identity is crucial in the case presented here. The obstacle to lasting solidarity was not a competing form of solidarity but rather competing identities. While workers in Cincinnati did identify as workers that identity was not stronger than the one of race. This was not the case in Columbus where workers identified both with their race and as workers. This is in part due to the use of war stories (Hunt and Benford 1994) to unite themselves and view the issue with the same lenses. Studies that have demonstrated the challenges and lack of solidarity among racially diverse populations should not be taken to mean that workers can not create solidarity due to racial identities, but rather that the hurdle may simply be larger. This is illustrated in the ethnographic work of Lopez (2004) and the unity that was found. Lopez also finds that SEIU can at times seek short term goals in which “initial victories are defended against counterattack and then extended over time” (Lopez 2004:219). This appears to be the case in Cincinnati where a great deal of effort was placed in garnering large scale recognition of janitors while failing to create lasting bonds of solidarity. Future campaigns may very well have to start from scratch to form new bonds of solidarity. This is in part why Early (2004) has criticized the SEIU as a top down service oriented union. However, Columbus presents a different picture. In Columbus, solidarity persists. As opposed to the antagonisms of Cincinnati, workers still interact with the union and with each other.
Whether or not organizers meant to create solidarity among workers through the use of stories is unclear. However, what is clear is that stories of discrimination did resonate among workers in Columbus while similar stories never arose in Cincinnati. Likewise, social activities in as well as out of the Columbus union house served to create a sense of comfort and camaraderie that lasted beyond just success of the campaign. The level of solidarity and lack of racial tensions in Columbus appears amplified further by the sheer lack of solidarity and clear signs of racial tensions in Cincinnati. The distinction is further augmented by the expectation that Columbus would have signs of racial cleavages given the recent Somali influx and the history of minority groups used as a scapegoat. Clearly, this was not the case in Columbus.

O’Brien (2008) demonstrates that utilizing demographic challenges can actually help to politically unite rather than divide workers. While organizers in Cincinnati felt as though race was not a concern, unbeknownst to them, it ensured that a worker identity would be fleeting. Conversely, the experience in Columbus actually addressed the various identities and united them through stories of what could happen to workers as a whole. By focusing on the experiences of Somali Muslims, that is to say by focusing on demographic differences, Columbus was able to foster a shared and lasting worker identity. This combined with the already existing identities and pride in work (Newman 1999) will place Columbus at an advantage when it comes time to renegotiate contracts.
REFERENCES


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