

# America's Tomorrow: Equity Is the Superior Growth Model



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## Features

### Port of Opportunity: Landmark Jobs Deal in Oakland, California



Rayna Smith

A massive project to redevelop the shuttered army base in Oakland, California, will create hundreds of good jobs and training opportunities for local residents, under a landmark agreement crafted jointly by the city, the community, unions, and the developers. It shows what's possible when a city comes together to make sure large-scale development strengthens the local economy and creates 21st century opportunities for the people who need them most.

## In Brief

### Closing the Generation Gap

Our nation's changing demographics present an opportunity to develop intergenerational solutions that strengthen our families and communities. A new report, [\*Out of Many. One: Uniting the Changing Faces of America\*](#), lifts up ideas from leading policy thinkers and emerging millennial leaders to identify bold solutions in four areas: housing, economy, transportation, and civic participation, including a contribution from our own Anita Hairston.

### Cooking up Careers for Ex-Offenders

A new bistro in Boston is offering fresh fare and a new start for the formerly incarcerated. The owner of [\*Whisk\*](#), who became passionate about food after being released from prison, has been working with a local nonprofit to employ people transitioning from prison and give them the skills to succeed in the industry. Both the food and the program are getting [\*rave reviews\*](#).

A 30-organization coalition called Revive Oakland led the community campaign to build the project on a foundation of equity and inclusion.

"The idea that you either meet the needs of the community or you meet the needs of the investors is a false dichotomy," said Fred Blackwell, assistant city administrator for the City of Oakland. "That's important and it's liberating. You don't have to make a choice between one and the other. You can do both."

The \$800 million public-private venture is Oakland's biggest development project in decades. It will transform public land the size of 200 football fields into an international trade and logistics center serving the Port of Oakland and supporting the development of a stronger, more globally connected regional economy. The first \$500 million phase of the project is expected to create more than 1,500 construction-related jobs over the next seven years, and 1,500 permanent jobs in operations. The agreement, which covers this first phase of the project, guarantees that half the jobs will go to Oakland residents.

The project broke ground this November.

### **Unprecedented agreement**

The agreement sets the most far-reaching job standards yet for Oakland and for the warehouse industry nationwide. The local hire provisions cover both construction jobs and permanent operations jobs, a first for the city. And for the first time anywhere, the use of temporary employment agencies to fill warehouse jobs will be strongly limited. This puts the brakes on a growing practice that has reduced wages and job security industry-wide.

The agreement sets several other important standards:

- Employers may not pre-screen job applicants for prior criminal records. This gives formerly incarcerated residents a fairer shot at employment.
- Every worker will earn a living wage — currently a minimum of \$11.70 an hour plus benefits in Oakland.
- Twenty-five percent of apprenticeship hours are designated for veterans, ex-offenders, the long-term unemployed, and others facing barriers to employment, and all new apprenticeships will go to Oakland residents.

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### **Health Workers Needed: Apply Here**

Over four million jobs will be created in health care over the next decade, making this sector one of the largest engines for job growth. But how do we ensure workers of color will be prepared for these jobs? A new [report](#) from the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies examines how to strengthen racial diversity in the health-care workforce.

- A city-run jobs resource center in West Oakland — the low-income community of color adjacent to the project, where unemployment rates run as high as [45 percent](#) — will connect residents to training, pre-apprentice programs, and jobs.

The project also brings environmental gains for West Oakland, including freight rail service to reduce truck traffic and pollution, and the relocation of two recycling plants from the neighborhood onto the site. A community oversight board will monitor compliance.

### **Eyes on the prize**

The agreement culminates years of debate over the future of the Oakland Army Base, which closed in 1999. The city championed an ambitious development to grow the economy. Revive Oakland, a coalition of faith leaders, unions, youth organizers, and advocates for communities of color, came together under the banner of economic justice in a city where African Americans, Latinos, Asian Americans, and Pacific Islanders, combined, make up nearly [70 percent](#) of the population, and [22 percent](#) of residents live in poverty.

"We were promised that when the base was rebuilt, it would bring good jobs for the community," said Kate O'Hara, Revive Oakland campaign director at the East Bay Alliance for a Sustainable Economy. "Now we are making good on that promise and creating real opportunities for people here."

Coalition members worked with city officials to develop the good jobs framework. What began as a contentious debate painstakingly led to a consensus package of policies adopted unanimously by the city council and used as a framework in negotiations with the developers. Blackwell, who presided over the multiparty talks, said the key was getting everyone to keep their eye on the prize.

"It's being straightforward and transparent with all the parties involved, and focusing on what each one wanted to achieve," said Blackwell.

### **More good jobs = less violence**

Local youth leaders built momentum for the campaign by focusing on how good jobs can reduce violence in their communities. [The Good Jobs Organizing Academy](#) of the Urban Peace Movement, a youth empowerment organization

and a member of the coalition, convened young people who hosted a 300-person youth concert with the theme, "More good jobs = less violence." Peace movement activists like Rayna Smith spoke publicly and movingly about their experiences with violence and their hopes for a prosperous future.

Smith was only a year old when her pregnant mother was shot in the head one April night in Oakland. She lived on life support until she gave birth to a healthy boy, in August. Then she died. Smith, now 22, has seen more people than she can count affected by crime and violence, and as she told the developers and the city council, she knows the solution: "Jobs, jobs jobs," she said "I'm 110 percent positive that when people get jobs, the crime rate will go down."

Revive Oakland is now turning its attention to the second half of the project, on land owned by the Port of Oakland, to make sure it incorporates similar job standards.

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## Building a Solidarity Economy in Jackson, Mississippi: An Interview with Mayor Lumumba

Building business cooperatives. Requiring employers to hire local. Investing in infrastructure that helps underserved communities participate and thrive. These are some of the ways that Chokwe Lumumba, the new mayor of Jackson, Mississippi, plans to build a strong, inclusive economy in his city. An attorney, a longtime black nationalist organizer, a human rights activist, and a co-founder of the [Malcolm X Grassroots Movement](#), Lumumba won by a landslide in June — just days before the 50th anniversary of the [assassination of Medgar Evers](#) in Jackson.



Mayor Chokwe Lumumba, City of Jackson, Mississippi

*America's Tomorrow* spoke with the mayor as he started his sixth month in office.

**Describe your economic vision for Jackson.**

To bring the city to economic promise. To develop more wealth here and to spread it. Infrastructure has become one of the pillars of our development program — streets, sewer systems, water delivery, drainage. Jackson has declining infrastructure, which creates a lot of pain and unrest in terms of our ability to control our homes, flooding, and all those kinds of things. But it also opens us up to opportunities to create jobs through repairing infrastructure. With the right kind of trigger revenues, we can get this process started.

**Where do you start?**

We start from the ideas that we have to rehabilitate Jackson's infrastructure and we have two principles that have to stay intact. One, if you are going to carry on business in Jackson — and there is going to be a lot of business in Jackson — you have to employ the people of Jackson. If you're a major employer, 60 percent of your employees should come from Jackson. Second, we have to expand the economic base of Jackson — which is nearly 80 percent African American — so over half of the project subcontractors and partners have to be so-called minority developers. We want the wealth that is going to be generated to stay in Jackson.

**Where will the city find the money to invest in infrastructure?**

To start, we raised the water rates and we raised the sewer rates. Our water and sewer rates were only half as much as many of the southern cities. Politicians for years here have been kicking the can down the road, letting our systems deteriorate and go without the necessary maintenance because they didn't want to raise taxes or do anything that was going to get them unelected. We did create a fund for the vulnerable, people on fixed income, and other economically disadvantaged. And we are now moving on a one percent sales tax. We have the referendum in January. We are asking the people to vote on it, which would bring in \$5 million a year for at least 20 years.

Our infrastructure problem is more than a \$1 billion problem. But we have figured out revenues that kick-start change, and if we can begin to do the development we need to do, and if we can comply by the rules that we set out, then that's going to mean we are going to create more property owners, more

businesses, and more sales tax dollars, which is going to help the Jackson economy move in the right direction.

**You've talked about building a solidarity economy. What does that mean?**

We are trying to promote solidarity between our neighborhoods, solidarity between owners, and solidarity between workers. We are trying to promote the idea of workers as owners. But, we're also trying to do the same kind of linkage and economic development with the western part of the state. We have here in Mississippi, on the western side, 18 counties including the one we are in. Seventeen of those counties are predominately black. The other one is 53 percent white. In order for Jackson to realize its potential as a serious capital of Mississippi and as an economic center of business, we need development in these other areas.

**Sounds like you're talking about regional economic growth, but during the campaign you were portrayed as a critic of regionalism.**

Regionalism has generally been defined as a way to try to divest predominately black cities of their right to control their resources. We see that in many parts of the country. That kind of regionalism is not going to happen here. I am against regionalism that disempowers us and puts us at a disadvantage. I am very much for the unification of economic units in this district, as I described.

**What are your development priorities in addition to infrastructure?**

Housing is critical. We have to develop affordable housing. A consciousness of cooperative development is critical. We have the examples of different cooperatives developing across the country and we are looking at those kinds of developments. Training is critical. If businesses coming here or businesses already here are going to be participating with the city and opportunities from the city, we are saying they have to help train the population of Jackson. Youth development is critical. We are creating all kinds of projects to get our youth trained.

**What are your plans to connect young people to economic opportunity?**

I believe in a fair and just distribution of the wealth. I believe wealth belongs to the community as a whole, especially

mass-produced wealth. I understand that's not the kind of economy we have here in Mississippi or in the United States. So what becomes important is to find ways that we can instill, first of all, that kind of thinking in our young people so they will keep that vision to change our economic system. Realistically, what we need to do is develop cooperative models and private projects which will hopefully foresee the future of economic life in Jackson, Mississippi.

### **Who are your political heroes?**

Foremost, Malcolm X and Martin Luther King Jr. When King was murdered, that event inducted me into the movement, literally. From that day to this day, I have been involved in organizations — whether student, political, national, or community organizations — to fight for the liberation of black people.

### **Back then did you imagine you'd be sitting in the mayor's chair now?**

No! No, no, no. I didn't think this was the way liberation came about.

### **What do you want the world to know about Jackson?**

Jackson is open for business. Open for residents. Readers who read this and want to come to Jackson, just come right on. We have a lot of building to do and growing to do so I want to make sure that invitation is given. We will be developing a route where people can give to nonprofit developments, to be on the cutting edge of the green industry, cooperative development, a lot of work with our youth as well. I want to encourage people to stay in touch with us. They can do that by calling 601-960-1084. That's the mayor's office.

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*America's Tomorrow* highlights campaigns, leaders, policies, reports, and local models that are advancing equity as an economic imperative. It is produced by Chris Schildt, Sarah Treuhaft, Fran Smith, and Ana Louie. To learn more, visit the *America's Tomorrow* [webpage](#).

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