

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



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## Features

### What's Cooking? Equity and Opportunity for Restaurant Workers



Make your next restaurant meal an opportunity to build an equitable economy. In her new book, [Behind the Kitchen Door](#), Saru Jayaraman explains how consumers can support efforts to raise wages, improve working conditions, create career pathways, and eliminate racial inequities in an industry that employs one in 12 U.S. workers. She co-directs the

Restaurant Opportunities Center (ROC) and directs the Food Labor Research Center at the University of California, Berkeley.

#### What's the biggest injustice in restaurant work?

Abysmally low wages. They drag down the whole economy. The current minimum wage for tipped workers is \$2.13 an hour. The terrible truth is that the people who put food on our tables can't put food on their own table.

#### Who is affected most?

Seventy percent of tipped workers are women. And workers of color experience a \$4 wage gap compared to white workers.

#### What is the impact on the nation at large?

The restaurant industry is tied with retail as the nation's largest and fastest growing employer. Restaurants also have seven of the 11 lowest paying jobs in this country. Today, of

## In Brief

### Equity: the Driving Force of Singapore's Success

Countries with greater economic equity perform better for everyone. That's the lesson from around the globe, [writes](#) Nobel Laureate Joseph E. Stiglitz.

"Singapore has... prioritized social and economic equity while achieving very high rates of growth over the past 30 years — an example par excellence that inequality is not just a matter of social justice but of economic performance."

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### What to Do When the Factory Shuts Down? Buy It!

When the workers at a Chicago factory were laid off in 2008, they led a six-day occupation of the plant that made national headlines. Today, they have bought the factory and turned it into a worker-owned cooperative, [New Era Windows](#). The workers not only kept their jobs, but also hope to inspire a new way to create jobs in America.

every four jobs, one is low- or poverty-wage. By 2020, that number will be one in two. Restaurants are a big reason for that.

### **Your book describes the restaurant workforce as incredibly diverse.**

That's the beauty of this industry. It brings different people together — black, immigrant, young, and old. But it's also very hierarchical and segregated by race and by gender. It has the potential to be this beautiful place where workers from all backgrounds can come together, but that isn't the reality in most restaurants.

### **What does the segregation look like?**

People of color are relegated to lower level positions, while white workers are often in management and waiter positions. In some cities, like Miami, the color line is so severe that it literally gets darker the further back you go. Wait staff will be white, runners will be Mexican or from Central America, and the dishwashers will be Haitian. And the hourly wage also changes dramatically, with wait staff making as much as five times as bussers.

There's also industry segmentation. People of color are concentrated in low-paying types of restaurants, such as fast-food or quick-serve restaurants. African Americans are locked out almost entirely from job opportunities in fine dining in many cities, where good paying jobs are.

### **What are the opportunities for change?**

Tremendous! More than 100 restaurants around the country are taking the high road to profitability, providing good wages and good working conditions. They prove that you can treat workers right, offer affordable prices to consumers, and make a good profit.

### **What policy opportunities are on the horizon?**

I'm very optimistic about the federal proposals to raise the minimum wage, including for tipped workers. A bill introduced last month by Representative George Miller (D-California) and Senator Tom Harkin (D-Iowa) would increase the minimum wage to \$10.10, and the tipped minimum wage to 70 percent of that. This would be tremendous for restaurant workers. We need to keep the pressure on.



Is this a model for building a more equitable economy? Read their story [here](#) and tweet your response [@policylink](#) [#equitableeconomy](#).

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### **A Federal Budget to Grow the Economy**

The [Back to Work Budget](#) proposed by the Congressional Progressive Caucus would create 7 million jobs through investments in infrastructure, education, and other critical supports. With unemployment at 14 percent for African Americans and nearly 10 percent for Latinos, we need these investments to build an inclusive economy.

### **How can consumers support quality jobs and equity in this industry?**

ROC has won 13 campaigns from big restaurants, including winning back \$7 million in stolen tips and wages, winning benefits and promotions for workers of color, and getting rid of racist management. In every single one of these victories, consumer engagement was a key part of our campaign. It is incredibly effective when consumers tell restaurants that they won't eat there until they do the right thing.

### **How did you get interested in restaurant workers?**

My parents are immigrants from India, so I have always had an interest in immigrant worker rights. On September 11, 79 workers at Windows on the World, the restaurant at the top of the World Trade Center, lost their lives. About 250 workers lost their jobs. Their union called me to ask if I would help provide relief to the survivors and the families of the victims.

### **Then you co-founded the Restaurant Opportunities Center with one of the former employees.**

Very quickly, we were overwhelmed with calls for help from restaurant workers from all over the city and then all over the country. We now have 10,000 members in 19 cities across the country.

For more information on how to support restaurant workers during your next meal, visit: <http://rocunited.org/>.

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## **Welcoming New Americans: A Grassroots Movement Grows Nationwide**



Local resident Kasar Abdulla at a community forum

Imagine if America rolled out the welcome mat for immigrants.

That's the idea behind a Tennessee initiative to get long-time residents and newcomers to engage in honest, respectful dialogue, community by community, and create an atmosphere in which all can prosper.

By tapping into fundamental values — seeing our own experiences in the lives of others, honoring the promise of America as a land of opportunity — the Welcoming Tennessee Initiative is transforming fears about rapid demographic change into an embrace of diversity and recognition that equity and inclusion are essential for economic growth. The success of the project has inspired a national movement.

"Immigrants are job creators," says Eben Cathey, communications coordinator of the Tennessee Immigrant and Refugee Rights Coalition (TIRCC), which started Welcoming Tennessee in Nashville in 2006. "Immigrants started 28 percent of all businesses in 2011, even though they are only 13 percent of the population. Immigrants in Nashville are a large part of the business community and an important part of our economy."

Welcoming Tennessee uses homespun strategies like community dinners and billboards to spread positive messages about immigrants and spur constructive conversation among old and new residents. The positive public discourse and community engagement have helped protect the state from the wave of anti-immigrant legislation that has swept through Georgia, Alabama, and South Carolina. For instance, pro-immigration voices — including business

leaders, community organizers, and immigrants themselves — defeated an "English-Only" referendum in Nashville in 2009, on economic as well as moral, social, and religious grounds. They have gone on to defeat state legislation for English-only driver's license exams.

### **Welcome the immigrant you once were**

Like many states, Tennessee had little experience with large-scale immigration until recently. Now it has the nation's [third fastest growing foreign-born population](#), with an immigrant workforce that has nearly [doubled](#) in the past decade.

After years of advocating for equitable, inclusive policies that would allow Tennessee immigrants to take part fully in economic and civic life, the immigrant rights coalition concluded that to have long-term impact, the organization needed to address underlying anxieties, prejudice, and bias in communities feeling buffeted by change. Welcoming Tennessee launched by plastering its message on billboards in Nashville: "Welcome the immigrant you once were. "I was a stranger and you welcomed me."

The initiative went on to organize volunteer welcoming committees and ambassadors in Nashville, Shelbyville, and recently Chattanooga. The idea is to engage people who want to make their communities welcoming places, to change the messages the public hears about immigrants from the media and the political discourse, and to get people talking at community meetings, church potlucks, or even around kitchen tables — to get immigrants telling their stories and longtime residents listening, and sharing their own.

The work inspired the 2010 documentary *Welcome to Shelbyville*, where locals initially reacted warily, and sometimes with open hostility, to the influx of Somali refugees to work in a chicken processing plant. The film traces Welcoming Tennessee's progress in fostering honest, respectful conversation starting in the town of 16,000.

The success of the Welcoming Tennessee Initiative spurred immigrant advocacy organizations around the country to follow its lead. In 2008, a national collaborative, Welcoming America, formed to strengthen and spread efforts on the ground — especially in new destination communities like Shelbyville. With 21 state affiliates, the network engaged 18,000 people in welcoming events in the last year alone.

"When we bring diverse people together to sit down and talk with one another, the hate-filled rhetoric about immigration just doesn't hold up," says Cathey. "Long-time residents come to realize that anti-immigration policies aren't necessary and are hurtful to their neighbors, their friends, and themselves."

Learn more about the Tennessee Immigrant and Refugee Rights Coalition (TIRRC) [here](#), and find a welcoming group in your community: [www.welcomingamerica.org](http://www.welcomingamerica.org).

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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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