Literature Review

The role of US unions in the civic integration of immigrant workers

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Introduction

Four streams of scholarly research have addressed the union role in integrating workers and their families in society. The first stream on the "union as a mutual aid society" hails from the early-twentieth century coincidence of immigration to the U.S., urbanization, and the advent of mass production manufacturing. The emblematic work in this stream is Frank Tannenbaum's *The Labor Movement: Its Conservative Functions and Social Consequences*. Written in 1921 at the height of the immigration wave from Eastern, Central and Southern Europe, this functional and largely descriptive work depicted the labor union as an immigrant worker mutual-aid society that provided workers with a range of social welfare and cultural benefits and thereby integrated workers into an otherwise atomized, rapidly emerging, impersonal urban-industrial social order (for reviews of this literature, see Cornfield 1990 and Fine 2006).

The second stream on "union democracy" research addresses the bureaucracy-democracy tension within unions and the integration of the individual worker into the social and political life of the union as a complex formal organization. This stream is partly inspired by Robert Michels' 1911 work *Political Parties*, in which Michels presented the "iron law of oligarchy," and C. Wright Mills' 1948 work, *New Men of Power*. These works held that unions, as formal democratic organizations, would inevitably oligarchize with a self-perpetuating, professionalized leadership elite and an inert membership as unions increased in size, complexity, and formality. This stream of research took shape during the so-called Golden Age of collective bargaining of the 1950s, by which time immigration to the U.S. had come to a virtual halt and U.S. unions had grown, stabilized, and become routinized, formal organizations within the Cold War labor law framework defined by the 1947 Taft-Hartley Act and 1959 Landrum-Griffin Act. The emblematic work of this era was Seymour Martin Lipset et al's *Union Democracy*, which attributed high membership involvement in union social and political life to the presence of political parties within the union and high and homogeneous social status of the members. Published in 1956, this work unleashed a torrent of research which has examined formal organizational, ideological, attitudinal, and sociodemographic determinants of individual member participation in a wide range of union social and political functions, such as holding union office, membership recruitment, participation in union social activities, filing employment grievances, fund-raising, etc. (for reviews of this research literature, see Benson 2002; Cornfield and Hodson 1993; Cornfield 1997; Flood et al 2000; Heckscher 2001; Iverson and Currivan 2003; Snape and Redman 2004).

Social capital research, the third stream of research on the union civic integration role, hails from the Tocquevillian pluralist concern with the impact of voluntary associations on the vibrancy of a participatory democratic society (Sellers 2007). Much of this small research literature has emerged during the last decade as

U.S. union membership has declined, along with other voluntary associations in the U.S. In this largely descriptive research stream, the union is conceived of and depicted as a passive organizational unit or stock of "social capital" (networks) that is declining and decreasingly linked to other institutional loci of power and status in society. The emblematic work in this stream is Robert Putnam's 2000 work, *Bowling Alone*, which describes the decline of U.S. union membership, its declining links to other institutions, and the withering of the civic integration role of U.S. unions over the post-World War II era (for a review of this literature, see Cornwell and Harrison 2004).

Finally, the fourth stream of research is the contemporary body of research on "labor revitalization" that has emerged over the last twenty years. This research stream responded to the post-World War II decline in union membership by examining the strategic actions taken by labor unions to reverse their decline (Hurd 1998; Nissen and Rosen 1999; Frundt 1999; Katz et al 2003). Labor revitalization actions include new approaches to organizing and expanding union membership jurisdictions to underrepresented and economically marginalized worker groups, including racial-ethnic minorities, immigrants, women, and the LGBT community (Hunt and Rayside 2000). This research stream has been animated and shaped by late-twentieth century identity politics and social movements, especially the civil rights and women's movements, and by the post-1990 wave of immigration from Africa, Asia, Eastern Europe, Latin America, and the Middle East. In the context of identity politics, social movements and immigration have altered the sociodemographic composition of the national non-union labor force, compelling revitalizing unions to resonate with and integrate native and immigrant workers' economic, racial-ethnic, and gender identities (Piore and Safford 2006; Weyher and Zeitlin 2005). For reviews of the labor revitalization literature, see Burawoy 2008; Cornfield and Fletcher 2001; Cornfield and McCammon 2003; Cornfield 2005; Morris and Clawson 2005; Nissen 2003; Turner et al 2001; Turner and Cornfield 2007; and the November 2005 special issue of *Work and Occupations* on labor and social justice, guest-edited by Lowell Turner and Kate Bronfenbrenner.

The labor-revitalization research stream has also been animated and shaped by the decline of manufacturing and the advent of the urban service economy that has been accompanied by increasing income polarization in the U.S. The urban service economy employs a disproportionately large number of immigrants and other economically marginalized groups in low-wage service jobs, as well as in construction and low-wage manufacturing jobs, such as food processing. In this "third moment" of U.S. labor's century-long institutional history[1] (Cornfield 2007), the city, with its co-extensive and inter-dependent labor and product

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[1] Cornfield (2007) presents three moments in the institutional history of the U.S. labor movement in which a set of cumulating and co-existing forms of labor organization were generated, each signaled by the establishment of a

markets of service workers and service consumers, becomes the socio-spatial arena in which social injustices arise and multi-ethnic, immigrant-native, labor-community, and worker-consumer coalitions are nurtured and unfold (Cornfield 2006; Milkman 2000, 2006; Ness 2005; Turner and Cornfield 2007).

Of the four research streams, the labor-revitalization stream addresses most directly the theme of union civic integration of immigrant workers.   Unlike the other streams, this stream treats the union as a creative, strategic actor. From this perspective, the union as an institutional actor is "strategic" in its calculated, purposive actions to seize organizing opportunities posed by the web of social relations with allies and antagonists in its urban political and labor-market context. The union is "creative" in that it creates and integrates both native and immigrant workers into multi-ethnic communities in the union itself, the workplace and labor market, and the city (Turner and Cornfield 2007).

I-Labor-Revitalization Research on Union Civic Integration of Immigrant Workers

The chief immigrant integration theme in labor-revitalization research is the achievement of multi-ethnic communities in unions, the workplace and labor markets, and the city. Labor-revitalization research has examined the connection between immigrant integration and three types of labor organizations: labor unions, worker centers, and labor-community coalitions.

A-Labor Unions and Immigrant Integration

Research on the development of multi-ethnic communities within unions addresses the conditions under which new immigrant ethnic groups in a local setting are recruited into an existing, ethnically and racially diverse national labor union. In *L.A. Story*, Milkman's (2006) comparison of two successful and two unsuccessful organizing campaigns among Los Angeles Latino workers in four occupations shows that immigrant workers are predisposed to unionize because of their dense social networks at home and work, their pre-immigration involvement in labor movements in their homelands, and the stigmatization they experience in the U.S. She shows that organizing campaigns driven by both top-down and bottom-up strategies were more likely to succeed than those that adopted only one of these strategies. (Also, see Lund 2004; Milkman 2000; and Ness 2005).

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national labor federation: 1) craft unionism (1880s – 1935), founding of the American Federation of labor in 1886; 2) industrial unionism (1936 – 2005), founding of the Congress of Industrial Organizations in 1936; and 3) multi-jurisdictional unionism in the low-wage, urban service economy (2005 – present), founding of Change to Win in 2005.

Research on the development of multi-ethnic communities inside unions has also addressed the integration of ethnic-racial minorities and women into elective, union leadership positions. In *Becoming a Mighty Voice*, Cornfield (1989, 1993) presents a status-conflict theory of union leadership change. According to this theory, ethnic-racial minorities and women are most likely to become integrated into labor union leadership positions when a union faces a high level of conflict with employers, when union leaders perceive ethnic-racial minority and women workers to be of strategic importance to the union for replenishing its sagging membership, and in unions which harbor a universalistic ideological orientation.

Little or no research has addressed the challenges unions face in developing sustainable, multi-ethnic communities in the workplace and labor market. Recent news coverage of the food-processing industry shows the variable outcomes of union efforts to achieve multi-ethnic communities in workplaces and labor markets. For example, after much nativist opposition to Somali workers in a Tennessee Tyson plant, the union achieved Muslim religious holiday accommodations through collective bargaining (Greenhouse 2008c). However, the recent case of an ICE raid on hundreds of undocumented Latino workers in an Iowa Agriprocessors plant shows how federal deportation actions can dampen union organizing campaigns (Greenhouse 2008a; Preston 2008a). (Also, see Greenhouse 2008b).

Research on immigrant labor organizing has underemphasized the influence of urban context on organizing capacity and opportunities for establishing and sustaining multi-ethnic communities within unions and workplaces. Immigration research distinguishes between "gateway" and "new destination" cities (Cornfield 2009). Gateway cities such as Los Angeles are traditional ports of entry that are characterized by large, densely networked, multi-generation and class-differentiated immigrant ethnic communities; established ethnic enclave subeconomies; a high percentage of politically enfranchised naturalized citizens; highly developed social-support systems and political organization; and, consequently, a relatively low level of stigmatization of immigrants by the native community. In contrast, new destination cities are located in the U.S. inter-coastal interior region in which first-generation immigrants have been rapidly settling only since 1990. New destination cities, consequently, have social, economic, and political characteristics that are "opposite" those of gateway cities, that pose formidable barriers to immigrant labor organizing, and that compel politically non-enfranchised first-generation immigrants to develop coalitions with politically enfranchised native partners, often in a hostile, anti-immigrant local community.

What is more, gateway cities tend to be located in states with "labor-tolerant" state labor laws. With the exception of the Southern gateway cities—Miami, Houston, and New Orleans, gateway cities tend to be

located in states that lack right-to-work laws—e.g. New York (New York City), California (Los Angeles, San Francisco), Illinois (Chicago), Massachusetts (Boston) and Washington (Seattle). In contrast, new destination cities are more likely than the gateway cities to be located in states with right-to-work laws. In Singer's (2004) Census-derived typology of cities with rapidly growing immigrant populations, "emerging," "re-emerging," and "pre-emerging" cities approximate what others refer to as "new destination cities"—i.e. cities with small and recently and rapidly growing, foreign-born populations. Of Singer's 21 emerging, reemerging, and pre-emerging cities, 14 are located in states with right-to-work laws.

B-Worker Centers and Immigrant Integration

Reminiscent of the "union as a mutual aid society" research stream, research on worker centers addresses how immigrants address their well-being simultaneously as members of an ethnic group and as workers.   In *Worker Centers*, Fine (2006: 2) describes worker centers as "community-based mediating institutions that provide support to low-wage workers." According to Fine, most worker centers are established by one or more immigrant ethnic groups and operate independently of labor unions. They engage in political organizing that can influence working and employment conditions and in the provision of a wide range of social welfare and legal services. As small, under-resourced, ethnic organizations, worker centers typically lack the "disruptive" capacity of labor unions to influence employment conditions. (Also, see Jayaraman and Ness 2005 and Tait 2005).

More research is needed on the sustainability of worker centers as enduring, multi-ethnic communities and the influence of local urban context on worker center effectiveness. For example, located in a gateway city in a right-to-work state, the New Orleans Workers Center for Racial Justice (NOWCRJ) was originally founded as a progressive biracial coalition to address racial injustices that occurred in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. The NOWCRJ has recently extended its mission by representing and advocating on behalf of hunger-striking, immigrant Indian metalworkers on the Gulf Coast who claim they were victims of human trafficking (NOWCRJ 2008; Preston 2008b).

C-Labor-Community Coalitions and Immigrant Integration

The contemporary era of identity politics and the urban service economy compel revitalizing labor unions to forge coalitions with identity-based groups and social movements and cross-class coalitions with middle class consumer groups. Coalitions between unions and identity groups such as civil rights groups generate "labor solidarity" and mobilization potential across worker groups. In the urban service economy with co-extensive

and inter-dependent product and labor markets, coalitions between unions and consumer groups aggregate political votes across social classes and generate political influence within a city (Cornfield 2005, 2007; Jones-Correa 2001; Reynolds 1999; Van Dyke and McCammon 2010).

Much of the research on labor-community coalitions has documented the configurations of coalition partners, issues, and the tactics and strategies that have led to the formation of labor-community coalitions. These labor-community coalitions have involved a wide range of coalition partners—such as other unions, other social movement organizations, immigrant rights groups, political party organizations, faith-based groups, environmental groups, civil rights groups, human rights groups, neighborhood and community groups, etc. The coalitions have addressed a wide range of issues, such as living wage campaigns, economic development, employment and training, environmental issues, immigrant rights, civil rights, voting rights, and labor organizing campaigns (see the Spring 2003 special issue of *WorkingUSA* on labor-community coalitions guest-edited by David Reynolds and Turner and Cornfield 2007).

Voss and Bloemraad's (2011) study of the massive May Day mobilization in 2006 is among the most comprehensive studies of immigrant-labor rights mobilizations. It attributes the rise and demise of this multi-city demonstration to changing macro-political forces and state enforcement actions against undocumented workers (also, see Cornfield 2013).

More labor-community coalition research needs to address the sustainability of labor-community coalitions as multi-ethnic, immigrant-native communities. Hauptmeier and Turner's (2007) distinction between "social" and "political" coalitions is a helpful conceptual tool for extending labor-community coalition research on the theme of sustainability. According to Hauptmeier and Turner (2007, p. 130), "*[p]olitical coalitions* refer to cooperation between unions and parties, politicians, and other social actors, focused largely on elections and policy-making processes. *Social coalitions*, by contrast, include labor and other social actors such as community, religious, environmental and immigrant rights groups, focused on a range of political, economic, and social campaigns." By highlighting the distinction between electoral and movement politics, and between activism and policymaking, the distinction between coalition types can facilitate future analyses of the influence of coalition type on the development of sustainable and enduring multi-ethnic, immigrant-native political communities. Future research also should address the transformation of labor-community coalitions between the two types. For example, in which urban contexts does the transformation of a social coalition into a political coalition produce enduring multi-ethnic, immigrant-native political communities in a city?

Turner and Cornfield's (2007) typology of cities is helpful for developing a research agenda for addressing this question and, more generally, how urban context influences labor-revitalization and the development of sustainable, enduring multi-ethnic, immigrant-native communities. The two-dimensional typology rests on the assumption that pre-existing local labor movements and the configuration of ethnic-racial groups in a city shape the possibilities for labor-community coalition building in a city. The first dimension distinguishes cities by the presence of a local labor movement: "frontier cities" have weak local labor movements and constitute greenfield organizing sites; "union towns" have long-established local labor movements that often are integrated into the local polity. The second dimension distinguishes cities by their ethnic-racial composition, whether a city is "bi-ethnic" (white and one large minority group) or "multi-ethnic" (many ethnic minority groups).

Future research on the connection between labor revitalization and immigrant integration can apply and critically extend the typology in comparative-city studies. The typology is helpful for examining the impact of a city's pre-existing labor movement and ethnic composition on the union role in the civic integration of immigrant workers. As a two-dimensional typology of urban context, however, this approach to urban context is limited in its omission of dimensions of urban life that influence the course of immigrant incorporation in a city. For example, several immigrant gateway cities are also multi-ethnic, union towns; and new destination cities are often bi-ethnic, frontier cities. Theoretical insights from social scientific research on immigrant incorporation and assimilation can enrich the concept of urban context and explanations of how urban context shapes labor's role in the civic integration of immigrant workers.

II- The Theory of Segmented Assimilation

The theory of segmented assimilation (TSA) was developed by sociologists Alejandro Portes and Rubén Rumbaut to explain the multiple assimilation pathways an immigrant group may take. In contrast to the traditional, linear, melting pot image in which successive, upwardly mobile, generations of an immigrant ethnic group acculturate and develop a "non-ethnic" "American" identity, the TSA holds that immigrant groups may experience three types of assimilation and social mobility trajectories over the generations: 1) downward assimilation; 2) mostly upward assimilation, blocked at times by discrimination; and 3) upward assimilation combined with biculturalism (Rumbaut and Portes 2001, p. 306; Portes and Rumbaut 2001, p. 63).

The TSA attributes inter-ethnic variations in assimilation-mobility outcomes to the "context of reception" of the native community and the immigrant group's "mode of incorporation" into the society. The "context of reception" refers to government policies, labor market conditions, inner-city subcultures and native community reactions to immigrants and ranges between hostile, tolerant, and supportive (Rumbaut and Portes 2001, pp. 231-2).

"Mode of incorporation" refers simultaneously to an immigrant group's social class (working class, professional, entrepreneurial) and degree of geographical residential concentration (Portes and Rumbaut 2001, p. 51). Upward assimilation with biculturalism is associated with a supportive context of reception and mode of incorporation that allows for "selective acculturation," that is: "a paced learning of the host culture with retention of significant elements of the culture of origin . . . Bilingualism [in the second generation] preserves channels of communication across generations . . . While such a path may appear inimical to successful adaptation in the eyes of conventional assimilationists, in fact it can lead to better psychosocial and achievement outcomes because it . . . gives children a clear reference point to guide their future lives" (Rumbaut and Portes 2001, pp. 308-309).

Little or no contemporary immigration research has addressed the impact of labor unions on the assimilation-mobility pathways of immigrants. The TSA implies that unions would be effective in helping immigrant workers to achieve "upward assimilation," including U.S. citizenship, the more successful unions are in helping immigrants to achieve a tolerant and supportive context of reception (Bloemraad 2006) and a mode of incorporation that allows immigrant workers to practice "selective acculturation."

The TSA also implies that labor organizing strategy should be responsive to the specific mode of incorporation of an immigrant ethnic group. Working class immigrant groups are more likely than professional and entrepreneurial groups to be responsive to labor unions. Labor unions should deploy community-based strategies (e.g. worker centers) for residentially concentrated immigrant ethnic groups and workplace-based strategies (e.g. enterprise-anchored and labor market-anchored labor unions) for immigrant ethnic groups who are residentially dispersed throughout the city. What is more, immigration and labor-revitalization research has neglected the stance and role of labor unions in helping immigrants to become citizens, a crucial component of the civic integration and political incorporation of immigrant workers in society (Bloemraad 2006; Gerstle and Mollenkopf 2001).

Cornfield (2009) extends the concept of mode of incorporation and its implications for immigrant labor organizing in new destination cities. Based on immigrant focus groups in Nashville, Tennessee, the mode of

incorporation is a threefold typology of immigrant perspectives on the quality of relations an immigrant ethnic group maintains with the native community and the degree of internal social cohesion in the immigrant group. Each of the three types describes a suboptimal mode of incorporation compared to a mutually beneficial incorporation of an immigrant ethnic group in a new destination city: 1) "embattled" (adverse relations with natives, high internal social cohesion); 2) "atomized" (adverse relations with natives, low internal social cohesion); and 3) "unsettled" (cultural intolerance expressed by natives, high internal social cohesion). Moreover, each type of mode of incorporation is associated with a residential settlement strategy: 1) embattled, "defensive, residentially segregated"; 2) atomized, "opportunistic, moderately segregated"; and 3) unsettled, "accommodationist, moderately segregated." The full implications of this typology of immigrant incorporation and residential settlement for labor organizing have not been assessed empirically. The typology implies that in order for labor unions, as mainstream native institutions, to maximize trust and openness with a target immigrant worker group, the labor union needs to fashion a labor organizing approach and strategy that is responsive to and resonates with the mode of incorporation and residential strategy experienced and taken by the immigrant group (Kieffer and Ness 1999; Juravich and Hilgert 1999).

III-Toward a Comparative-City Study of the Union Role in the Civic Integration of Immigrant Workers

The stance of the U.S. labor movement toward immigration and immigrant workers has oscillated between restricting entry and incorporating immigrants into the labor movement over the last century (Briggs 2001; Burgoon et al 2010). The present era is one in which the labor movement is organizing immigrant workers and advocating for pathways to citizenship (Cornfield 2007). The present era also is characterized by identity politics, heightened income inequality, economic recession, and mounting anti-immigrant nativism. For these reasons, the contemporary moment affords researchers the opportunity to examine the union role in the civic integration of immigrant workers, as well as the opportunity to illuminate pathways toward a mutually beneficial incorporation of immigrants in the U.S.

This literature review suggests a national, comparative-city study of the union role in immigrant civic integration with these characteristics:

A-Purpose: to examine the urban-contextual conditions under which different types of labor organizations influence the formation of enduring, multi-ethnic, immigrant-native communities inside unions, workplaces and labor markets, and the city.

B- Object of Study: multi-ethnic, immigrant-native communities (MICs). An MIC is a self-determining, socially diverse group that pursues the social, economic, and political interests of native and immigrant workers within labor unions, in workplaces and labor markets, and in the city. Emphasis on not only the formation of MICs, but also on their sustainability over time.

C-Theoretical Framing: a) labor revitalization literature; and b) literature on immigrant incorporation, especially the theory of segmented assimilation.

D-Chief Actor or Causal Agent: Types of Labor Organizations as Creative Strategic Actors: a) labor unions; b) community-based labor organizations such as worker centers; and c) labor-community coalitions.
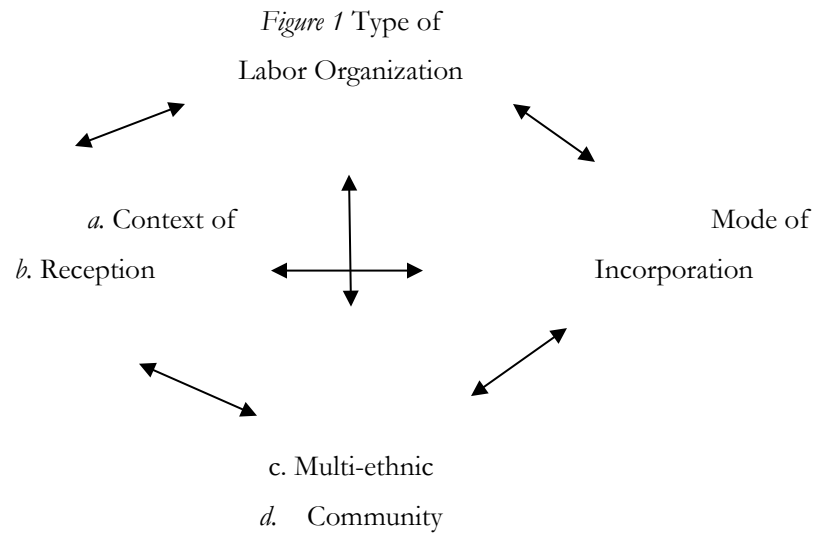
E-Indicators of Civic Integration Associated with MICs in Unions, Workplaces, and the City:

>   *a.* Unions: immigrant participation in union leadership and membership activities;
>
>   *b.* Workplaces and Labor Markets: cultural accommodations in workplaces for immigrant workers, equal and decent employment and working conditions and career opportunities for native and immigrant workers alike;
>
>   *c.* Cities: citizenship, immigrant participation in government and policymaking, immigrant participation in social and political coalitions.

F-City Selection Criteria: cities as study sites that represent different types of urban contexts:

>   *a.* Labor Strength: frontier cities and union towns
>   *b.* Ethnic composition: bi-ethnic and multi-ethnic cities
>   *c.* Immigrant Incorporation: gateway and new destination cities

G- Research Questions: research questions arise from the purpose and object of the study and the inter-play of central concepts from the labor revitalization and immigrant incorporation research literatures:

Figure 1 Type of
Labor Organization

a. Context of

b. Reception

Mode of

Incorporation

c. Multi-ethnic

d. Community

The following research questions derive from the above diagram and do not exhaust the full set of possible research questions:

H- Local context of reception: how do the levels of anti-immigrant worker nativism, employer dependence on immigrant labor, right-to-work laws, and state deportation threats vary geographically and by ethnicity-race, gender, industry, occupation, and macro-economic conditions?

I-Local mode of incorporation: how does the local context of reception shape patterns of immigrant workers' modes of incorporation in the local community?

J-Type of labor organization: How do local modes of immigrant worker incorporation influence the types of labor organization in which immigrant workers organize and participate?

K-Civic integration: How do different types of labor organization influence the range of ethnic groups, range of life-sustaining actions, the attainment of citizenship, and the sustainability of a multi-ethnic community?

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