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# Policy Brief

MARCH 2010

## The Impact of "Going Green" on the Latino Community

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### INTRODUCTION

The media is brimming with coverage of environmental degradation and resource depletion that is taking place at a rate that is unsustainable and harmful to humans. What is not given enough attention is the fact that blacks and Latinos, predominately living in urban areas, are exposed to the negative effects of environmental degradation more than any other group. Paradoxically, they are the groups least involved in the green movement (Collier 2006). A recent report by the UC Berkeley Center for Labor Research and Education shows multiple negative effects of environment degradation. Inner-city residents not only experience higher unemployment, but also higher rates of asthma and the associated costs of medical care (Morello-Frosch et al 2009). Yet President Obama's initial appointee for Environmental Quality was a foremost figure in noting that sustainable consumption could offer opportunities for unemployed inner-city residents. The organizations involved in the green movement have strived to create a more inclusive economy that not only preserves the environment, but offers employment opportunities in the green sector. There is hope that despite the ill effects of greater exposure to environmental health hazards for blacks and Latinos, a positive result of greater environmental awareness and action could be more jobs – jobs that better the environment.

This Tomás Rivera Policy Institute policy brief examines the extent to which a shift to a green economy presents both challenges and opportunities for Latinos primarily within the City of Los Angeles. The paper outlines the economic reasons for Latinos to seek new sources of work and examines the link between conservation and so-called

green jobs, a new category of work that could prove beneficial in Latino communities. We also land on the variety of projections for green job growth, and examine several policies related to green development that could affect Latinos. Finally, we relay what we have learned about the challenges facing Latinos in a green economy, with the looming possibilities of job loss in traditional sectors and marginalization from the green shift. Included is a critical look at the value American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA), which may fail to integrate substantial numbers of Latino laborers into the green economy.

### INNER-CITIES AND LATINO UNEMPLOYMENT

Latinos in the United States face unemployment rates higher than the national average. In 2008, for example, 6.1% of men and 5.4% of women in the labor force experienced unemployment; the respective figures were 7.6% for Latinos and 7.7% for Latinas (Current Population Survey 2008). Considering the size of the overall Latino labor force – 22 million men and women — the difference between the number of jobs among Latinos and the national average represents over 400,000 jobs. The discrepancy is roughly the same in urban areas, but is most acute among youth. In 2008, 26.2% of Latino youth (between ages 16-24) in Los Angeles were unemployed (Current Population Survey 2008).

As is widely acknowledged, after World War II, the economic boom in America provided stable, middle-class employment for manual laborers in manufacturing industries. These industries, however, began to decline

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Tomás Rivera Policy Institute gratefully acknowledges The Boeing Company for providing financial support for this project.

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after 1971, shedding many stable jobs in urban areas and creating pockets of concentrated, long-term poverty in inner-city neighborhoods (Wilson 1987). Inner-city underemployment and unemployment have been on the rise ever since.

Today, the growing service industry employs more workers than any other, but it is characterized by non-standard, unstable, low-wage work in businesses such as restaurants and hotels. Trends in immigration and suburbanization have increased the concentration of immigrants and minorities in urban neighborhoods, and their concentration in non-standard, unstable service work (Sassen 1988). An Applied Research Center review last year of unemployment rates from 1973 to 2009 found that “unemployment among people of color is consistently higher than recession-level unemployment rates for whites.”

In 2008, Latinos comprised more than half (54%) of the nation’s new job seekers (National Council of La Raza 2009). Part of this share can be attributed to the younger age distribution of Latinos. In 2007, the median age of the Latino population was 27.6, compared with the national median age of 36.6. In this same year, the Latino population was comprised of 34% of individuals under age 18, compared with 25% at the national level (U.S. Census Bureau News 2008). Latinos’ share of the population from 16 to 25 years old increased from 5% to 18% from 1970 to 2007 (Fry 2009). High inner city unemployment is another factor in the job-seeking numbers of Latinos.

Latinos have been impacted greatly by the economic recession. Rising debt, declining home sales, and decreasing home values have driven down maintenance of homes and investment in construction—an urban Latino niche. For example, in South Los Angeles, a de-industrialized, largely black and Latino neighborhood, construction employed more workers than any other industry (Lee and Ito 2009). Overall, the construction sector in California lost 300,000 out of 948,500 construction jobs since February 2006. From this figure, about 720,000 California Latinos were employed in the construction sector and 200,000 have lost their jobs since 2007 (Los Angeles Times 2010). In other words, Latinos comprised two-thirds of lost construction jobs in this time frame. According to a study by the Fisher Center for Real Estate and Urban Economics at the University of California, Berkeley, the median housing price in 2009 fell lower in Los Angeles and San Francisco than other metropolitan cities in the state (Kroll 2009: 3). The current recession affects employment stability in construction at the same time that South Los Angeles persists with the highest poverty and unemployment in Los Angeles County (i.e. Lee and Ito 2009).

## CONSERVATION CREATES GREEN JOBS

Climate change is hardest on those who live in the inner city, and the smoggiest cities in California also have the highest concentrations of non-white and low-income residents. As a result, these groups are more vulnerable to the detrimental effects of climate change (Morello-Frosch et al 2009). Lee and Ito (2009) surveyed South Los Angeles households and found that 38% were affected by asthma, 33% by diabetes, and 24% by cancer. In fact, “African Americans were twice as likely to die from a heat wave than other Los Angeles residents,” according to a report (Cordova et al 2006) cited in Morello-Frosch et al (2009:11). Furthermore, low-income and minority families spend as much as one-fourth of their income on food, electricity, and water—an amount that will only increase without strategic energy conservation (Cordova et al 2006, Morello-Frosch et al 2009).

Yet a positive side to the problem of climate change could emerge with a sweeping shift to green conservation techniques, creating jobs for people in inner cities. Van Jones, President Obama’s initial appointee for the White House Council for Environmental Quality, insisted that such a shift would not only fundamentally restructure the economy but create solutions to large-scale poverty on a scale rivaled only by Franklin Roosevelt’s post-war New Deal. Inner city residents appear to support a green movement, an important first step in this scenario. In South Los Angeles, 94% of residents want solar panels and environmental technologies in their neighborhoods and 88% think clean energy investment could improve job opportunities. Coupled with this, 98% think the government should be a leader in funding job programs (Lee and Ito 2009).

Already, three primary methods of conserving energy could stimulate job growth in a green economy: retrofitting existing buildings, creating new energy-efficient buildings, and investing in public transportation. It is worth noting that in order for a job to qualify as green, it must meet certain criteria and contribute to energy conservation (Applied Research Center 2009). A qualifiable green job requires training, offers a living-wage, and offers opportunities for career advancement—all crucial components in any plan designed to offset poverty and improve lives and communities. To get there, a green movement requires significant collaboration between workforce investment boards, economic development organizations, employers, training centers, community colleges, schools, community organizations, and labor unions.

## GREEN JOB GROWTH PROJECTIONS

Some include in the definition of green jobs a wider spectrum of employment opportunities. As a result, estimates and projections of green jobs vary depending on the source. A report by Economic Planning Systems, Inc. (EPS) projects that roughly .5 percent of the U.S. job market, 751,051 jobs, could be considered green (see Rice-Evans and Benassini 2009). However, green jobs also can be categorized into three sub-types: jobs with enhanced skills, new and emerging jobs, and increasing demand jobs (Rice-Evans and Benassini 2009). New and emerging jobs refer to unique work requirements, such as solar panel installers—jobs fitting the common conception of green. Increased demand jobs refer to jobs currently supporting the green economy that may simply increase in size, such as public transportation. Enhanced skills jobs include occupations that may already exist but in which retraining is necessary, such as construction. Under the broader definition, the number of green jobs would bump to 3,963,000 in 2007, for example, as demonstrated in Figure 1, below (Rice-Evans and Benassini 2009).

Growth projections for green jobs vary depending on the size of the net cast. By 2030, the total number of U.S. green jobs is projected to rise to between 3.5 million and 9.8 million, an average growth of between 120,000 and 240,000 jobs annually (Rice-Evans and Benassini 2009). The corresponding projection for green job growth in California is between 581,000 and 1,587,000 by 2030, translating to between 22,000 and 41,000 jobs in the state annually (Rice-Evans and Benassini 2009). Urban centers such as the greater Los Angeles area can expect similar modest growth from a greening economy. In 2008, only .5% of jobs in Los Angeles were estimated to be green in 2008, or about 39,000 (Rice-Evans and Benassini 2009). Using the same estimates, the figure grows to anywhere

between 141,000 and 312,000, an approximate growth of 31% for both figure projections (Rice-Evans and Benassini 2009).

## OCCUPATIONS AND CAREERS

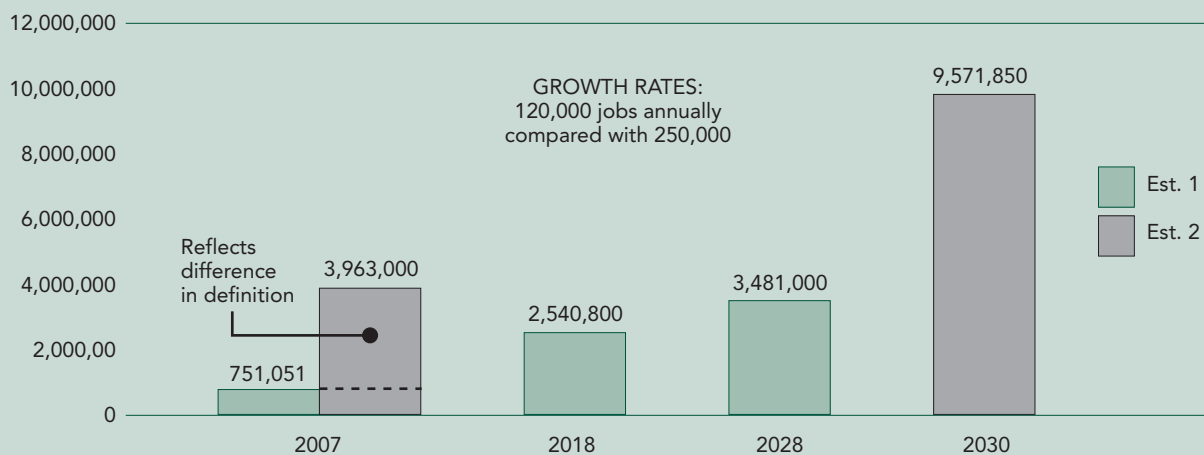
High skill jobs hold the most promise for career advancement. Such opportunities include wind turbine technicians, alternative fuel automotive technicians, solar system installers or technicians, and cost estimators for green building and retrofitting (Centers of Excellence 2009). A wind turbine technician, though, is particularly fitting in California, where the wind turbine capacity is expected to double in the next few years. Construction of wind turbines could call for as many as 520 to 1,820 jobs (Centers of Excellence 2009). The upgrades could create 230 to 380 new wind turbine technician jobs.

Other green occupations will also grow in demand in the next few years. By 2013, an additional 6,500 automotive technicians and repairers and 2,130 diesel engine mechanics will be required (see Table 2) (Centers of Excellence 2009). Green builders and retrofitters, trained and expected to know principles of green building, should increase by 3,400 jobs in the next three years (Centers of Excellence 2009). Even solar system installers and technicians are expected to increase by 2,400 jobs. At the lowest pay of these green jobs, system installers still earn a healthy \$31,000 to \$52,000 annually (Centers of Excellence 2009).

A growing demand for cost estimators of green construction would lead to upward mobility for some in the city: green building cost estimators earn an annual median salary of \$61,300 (Centers of Excellence 2009). Overall, a greening economy would have the most impact on construction, including retrofitting. Cities infrequently add new green buildings (that must meet Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) standards). It appears

Figure 1

### U.S. JOB ESTIMATES AND PROJECTIONS



Source: Rice-Evans and Benassini 2009

to be more energy efficient and sustainable in urban areas to retrofit; building from scratch causes considerable carbon emissions (Living Cities 2009). Still, it costs more to retrofit an existing building than build a new one, and renovations can inconvenience tenants. One projection suggests that in Los Angeles, almost one-fourth of all

occupations affected by a green economy will be in green construction (Rice-Evans and Benassini 2009), suggesting a suitable fix on the horizon for the present rising inner-city unemployment in construction. However, demand for green development is dependent on local government motivation and financial resources.

**Table 1.**

CALIFORNIA JOBS PROJECTION

CALIFORNIA REGION	EXISTING	ADDITIONAL GREEN JOBS (BY 2030)	
		Conservative	Expansive
Greater Los Angeles	38,871	141,000	312,000
Bay Area	33,855	123,000	272,000
Southern Border	20,062	73,000	161,00
Greater Sacramento	15,047	55,000	121,000
Inland Empire	7,523	27,000	60,000
San Joaquin Valley	6,270	23,000	50,000
Central Coast	2,508	9,000	20,000
Northern California	1,254	5,000	10,000
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>125,390</b>	<b>456,000</b>	<b>1,006,000</b>

Source: Rice-Evans and Benassini 2009

**Table 2.**

FIVE-YEAR EMPLOYMENT PROJECTIONS

**COST ESTIMATORS: FIVE-YEAR EMPLOYMENT PROJECTION**

SOC Code	Description	2008 Jobs	2013 Jobs	New Jobs	% Change	2007 Avg Hourly Earnings
13-1051	Cost Estimators	25,325	28,713	3,388	13%	\$30.92

Median salary for cost estimators in California is \$29.45 an hour or \$61,300 annually.

**BIOLOGICAL AND CHEMICAL TECHNICIANS: FIVE-YEAR EMPLOYMENT PROJECTION**

SOC Code	Description	2008 Jobs	2013 Jobs	New Jobs	% Change	2007 Avg Hourly Earnings
19-4021	Biological technicians	9,870	11,442	1,572	16%	\$21.30
19-4031	Chemical technicians	6,718	7,319	601	9%	\$20.66
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>16,588</b>	<b>18,761</b>	<b>2,173</b>	<b>13%</b>	<b>\$21.04</b>

**AUTOMOTIVE TECHNICIAN OCCUPATIONS: FIVE-YEAR EMPLOYMENT PROJECTION**

SOC Code	Description	2008 Jobs	2013 Jobs	New Jobs	% Change	2007 Avg Hourly Earnings
49-3020	Automotive technicians and repairers	82,829	89,322	6,493	8%	\$19.65
49-3030	Bus and truck mechanics and diesel engine specialists	25,549	27,681	2,132	8%	\$21.27
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>108,378</b>	<b>117,002</b>	<b>8,624</b>	<b>8%</b>	<b>\$20.03</b>

Source: Centers of Excellence 2009

## POLICIES AND GREEN JOBS

The recent American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) was designed in part to stimulate investment in a green movement both at national and regional levels. President Barack Obama pledged in the act to invest \$150 billion in clean energy solutions over the next 10 years, thereby creating five million new green jobs. In a nutshell, ARRA will support job-training and labor-market information programs by helping job-seekers find employment in green-related industries. Yet the bill's logistics on job creation are ambiguous. The Apollo Alliance estimates that it in reality would take \$500 billion to create the same number of green jobs the President has pledged to create (i.e. Los Angeles Apollo Alliance 2009).

Many organizations work at national and local levels to influence public policy and the green economy. One such coalition with a significant impact on greening efforts in Los Angeles is the Apollo Alliance, a national coalition of businesses, government agencies, and community organizations. The Apollo Alliance works to increase energy efficiency and quality jobs by supporting legislation as well as leading education and training programs. In an impressive step toward energy independence and the creation of more green jobs, Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa signed the Los Angeles Apollo Challenge in August 2006. Then, in 2009, the city embarked on an initiative to retrofit the city's municipal buildings. The planning and initiative were influenced by the work of the Los Angeles Apollo Alliance and its affiliate, Strategic Concepts in Organizing and Policy Education (SCOPE).

Another bill, the California Green Collar Jobs Act of 2008 (AB 3018), created a Green-Collar Jobs Council in the California Workforce Investment Board. The council facilitates California's shift to a green economy by structuring the planning, researching, and funding. Unfortunately, California governor Arnold Schwarzenegger vetoed California bill AB 1394, which would have provided funds to administer and structure the Green Jobs Collar Council. Also, SB 675, which would have invested \$5 billion in clean technology career technical education and job training, never made it past the state legislature.

Legislative changes to stimulate green development, training and job placement are key components of green job growth. The public sector, management, and labor, as well, have to partner to advance the process. To accelerate this process, various interest groups have advocated for grants for businesses, apprenticeship programs, non-profits and labor organizations. Such grants are useful in that they provide education, job training, or create pathways to a newly emerging green labor market. Grants also could strategically target the most disadvantaged communities, including opportunities for people on probation or parole.

## CHALLENGES TO A GREEN FUTURE

Job loss will be an unfortunate side effect of large-scale and long-term efforts for a green economy, despite the push to integrate the underemployed and unemployed into the labor market. The American Petroleum Institute estimates that 1.6 million Americans work in the oil and gas industry, while the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates that hundreds of thousands of Americans work in coal mining (Schulz 2009). A shift to a green economy would destabilize workers in these industries—an issue not taken into account often enough in green job growth estimates. One criticism of ARRA is that it will prove counterproductive, creating an expensive and unstable green workforce in the face of so many destroyed jobs (Schulz 2009). Schulz cites Spain as a country that attempted to revitalize its economy through green jobs creation (Schulz, 2009). A study conducted by the King Juan Carlos University in 2009 demonstrated that two jobs were lost for every new green job created due to higher costs. Another finding was that only one out of ten new jobs created was permanent. Such an argument is rooted in a long-standing tenet of neoliberal economics: government intervention reduces economic efficiency and stability.

However, a report from the Pew Charitable Trusts suggests that the green sector is "poised for explosive growth, driven by strong consumer demand, venture capital investment, and federal and state government support" (Huh and Grange 2009:24). Between 1998 and 2007, green collar jobs grew by 9.1 percent, 2.5 times faster than jobs overall (Huh and Grange 2009:26). Furthermore, a report by Next 10 states that the green industry in California is growing faster than the overall economy. From 2007 to 2008, green jobs increased by 5%, while total jobs decreased by 1% (Perry et al 2009: 10). Energy, energy efficiency, and environmentally friendly protection accounted for more than 90% of venture capital investments between 2006 and 2008. Moreover, during the first quarter of 2009, venture capital investment in the green sector dropped by less (48%) than all other sectors (61%) (Huh and Grange 2009:26).

Educating and providing training for Latinos will be a major challenge in efforts to include them in the growing green economy. Almost three-fourths (73%) of foreign-born Latino adults are Limited English Proficient (LEP), and only 4.9% receiving training are LEP (National Council of La Raza 2009). In fact, in 2008, only 67.1% of Latino workers had completed high school or some college, compared with 92.5% of whites and 88.2% of blacks. The National Council of La Raza (NCLR) claims that even the jobs created by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA), "will likely prove insufficient to employ the majority of Americans out of work, making education and skills even more critical to success in the labor market"

(National Council of La Raza 2009). ARRA does not target programs for limited English speakers, but states may implement ARRA in this way, and it can be done. NCLR (2009) advocates for integrating English-as-a-second-language (ESL) services with postsecondary education and training. For example, the Career Ladders Project helps meet the needs of language learners in job training in order to establish an employment bridge between underserved populations in community college and green economy employers (Career Ladders Project 2009).

## CONCLUSION

The economic recession has damaged employment across all sectors. Construction—an urban Latino niche—has been devastated by the housing crisis and economic downturn. However, new employment opportunities will arise through the planning and development of a more sustainable or green economy. Demand for wind turbine technicians, alternative fuel automotive technicians, solar system installers and technicians, and cost estimators for green building and retrofitting are all well-paying jobs that require training and skills. Organizations such as Apollo Alliance and SCOPE serve to connect businesses, training centers, labor organizations and non-profits. ARRA funding may facilitate the processes necessary to usher in a new model of economic development and employment. The entire plan hinges on communities being willing to make considerable structural changes, both in terms of building and renovation, and in the work world.

Naturally questions remain as to the capabilities of ARRA and how it can be implemented. Some jobs may be created, others may be lost; of some concern is the high price tag for green development and the stability of green jobs once government investment declines. However, a report from the PEW Charitable Trusts suggests that venture capital investment was already increasing prior to the recession, and that such investment has weathered the

recession more than other sectors. In addition, current patterns in energy consumption will have to shift as we begin to deplete the Earth's remaining resources.

Will gains made by green development translate into benefits for disadvantaged communities, such as Latinos? Even if successful, advances in the development of renewable energy and green collar jobs might not lift black and Latino communities out of poverty. We can expect a fair proportion of job loss in less efficient energy sectors. Furthermore, Latinos as a whole continue to face the same challenges of low levels of educational attainment and English proficiency that existed prior to the recession and ARRA. Although states may implement policies to bridge opportunities between disadvantaged language learners and ARRA sponsored training and employment, the state with the largest share of immigrants and Latinos was unsuccessful in passing such legislation; the California's legislature and governor were unable to pass SB 675 and AB 3018.

Without substantial intervention into education, the key to a future place in the green economy, Latino success in any type of career is limited. Private investment is expected to continue increasing in the green sector, and some job loss is anticipated in non-green sectors. As the relatively young, low-skilled, and under-educated Latino population continues to grow, it will be even more important for policymakers to consider focusing on and improving the educational and career ladder opportunities available to Latinos. This alone would be instrumental in helping build a future society where all members share an equal opportunity at gaining the type of education that will play a crucial role in improving the lives of their families and communities.

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### TRPI Mission Statement

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