



Bridging the Black-Immigrant Divide

A Media and Public Opinion Scan and Analysis

Prepared for The Opportunity Agenda by Loren Siegel Consulting

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In his essay, “Bridging the Black-Immigrant Divide,”¹ Alan Jenkins, Executive Director of The Opportunity Agenda, observed that the public conversation about immigration policy as reflected in the mainstream media focused in part on the relationship between African Americans and immigrants:

“And much of that conversation was framed in terms of competition and conflict. That framing was no accident. The mainstream media have fixated on potential points of black/immigrant tension, looking for a conflict storyline. And that storyline has been amply fed by conservative anti-immigrant groups intent on driving a wedge between the two communities.”

In order to gain a better understanding of how this conversation was unfolding in the African American press and how that coverage might be influencing African American public opinion we conducted a media scan of eleven major black newspapers nationwide and looked closely at relevant public opinion research.

Media Content Analysis: Major Findings

- The immigration debate as it is being played out on the national stage is not a high priority for the African American press in terms of its regular news coverage.
- The competition and conflict frame is not a dominant frame in the African American press’ news coverage.
- Readers of African American newspapers are being exposed to a range of political views through the publication of thoughtful op-eds and columns by

¹ Published on TomPaine.common sense, February 20, 2007

African American leaders and thinkers who are writing about the immigration issue as it affects African Americans.

- The African American press has shown interest in stories about:
 - Black immigrants and refugees from Africa and the Caribbean;
 - Shared injustices (police abuse, low-wage workplace conditions, discrimination);
 - African American local officials who take pro-immigrant stances.

Public Opinion Analysis: Major Findings

- African Americans are more supportive of immigrant rights than whites when it comes to issues of discrimination, unfairness and injustice.
- African Americans are more fearful than whites of negative economic effects of immigration both on the country as a whole and on their own job opportunities.
- Longitudinal research suggests that African American public opinion is shifting in the direction of more negative attitudes and beliefs about immigration and immigrants.

Recommendations

1. Generate and submit op-eds from respected African American thinkers and leaders that respond to the African American public's fears and promote the shared heritage/common struggle frame.
2. Look for and pitch stories that show concretely how unity between immigrants and African Americans can lift all boats.
3. Use the African American press as a springboard for access to black websites and radio and TV shows.

Bridging the Black-Immigrant Divide **A Media and Public Opinion Scan and Analysis**

Introduction

In his essay, “Bridging the Black-Immigrant Divide,”² Alan Jenkins, Executive Director of The Opportunity Agenda, observed that the public conversation about immigration policy as reflected in the mainstream media focused in part on the relationship between African Americans and immigrants:

“And much of that conversation was framed in terms of competition and conflict. That framing was no accident. The mainstream media have fixated on potential points of black/immigrant tension, looking for a conflict storyline. And that storyline has been amply fed by conservative anti-immigrant groups intent on driving a wedge between the two communities.”

In order to gain a better understanding of how this conversation was unfolding in the African American press and how that coverage might be influencing African American public opinion we conducted a media scan of major black newspapers nationwide and looked closely at relevant public opinion research.

The National Newspaper Publishers Association (NNPA) estimates the size of the black print media’s audience at 15 million.³ With an average age of about 44, readers of black newspapers are younger than mainstream newspaper readers, who average 55 years. Ninety percent of the black press audience is high school graduates, 6 in 10 having attended college.⁴

Much of the public conversation about immigration policy among African Americans during the period covered by our scan was taking place on talk radio. Arbitron, the giant media and marketing research firm, estimates that black News/Talk/Information programs capture 2.2 million African American listeners each week.

² Published on TomPaine.common sense, February 20, 2007, www.tompaine.com

³ That is the estimate of the major trade association of African American newspaper publishers. Subscriptions to African American newspapers, however, have been declining for quite some time. *Amsterdam News* subscriptions, for example, fell from 18,700 in 2004 to 13,175 in 2006. Annual Report on American Journalism, “The State of the News Media 2007” at www.stateofthenewsmedia.org/2007 All the newspapers we scanned have websites, but it was beyond the scope of this study to look at online readership figures.

⁴ Ibid.

No study has been published on the role of black talk show hosts in the immigration debate, but according to Greg Johnson, marketing director of KJLH, a leading black radio station in Los Angeles, "It's definitely one of the hottest topics on talk radio I've ever seen." Johnson reported that after the mass demonstrations in May of 2006 the majority of callers to KJLH favored more conservative enforcement solutions to immigration, but said the station was getting callers on all sides: "Some are adamant to get them [immigrants] out; others say, 'let's work with them;' and others say 'let's figure out how to regulate it.'"⁵

A year later, progressive African American columnist Alberta Phillips who writes for the *Austin American-Statesman* observed that although African Americans are the most loyal supporters of the Democratic Party, "when it comes to the politics of illegal immigration, they often sound more like right-wing Republicans."⁶ She described the sentiment on black talk radio: "The sentiment is strong and mostly one-sided: Illegal immigrants should not be rewarded for breaking our laws. And by any means necessary, including fences, the government must police and secure the border."⁷

One prominent talk radio personality who has weighed in heavily on the black-immigrant divide is Warren Ballentine who bills himself as "the People's Attorney." Ballentine has a syndicated show that airs on XM's "The Power" and other black-oriented stations and programs. He takes a strong anti-immigrant position. Appearing on CNN's "Lou Dobbs Tonight" in the midst of the Senate debate, Ballentine said: "My audience is very upset about this [illegal immigration]. Because it's destroying the middle class. They're taking construction jobs, they're taking trucking jobs."⁸

The black print media, however, has not adopted this negative frame. While showing little interest in reporting on the national debate over immigration policy *per se*, the African American press is hospitable to commentary on various aspects of the immigration issue, and reporters are writing stories about shared injustices, whether at the hands of the police or the employer.

Media Scan and Analysis

I. Major Findings

- The immigration debate as it is being played out on the national stage is not a high priority for the African American press in terms of its regular news coverage.

⁵ Daniel B. Wood, "Rising black-Latino Clash on Jobs," *The Christian Science Monitor*, May 25, 2006.

⁶ Alberta Phillips, "For blacks, immigration debate means a fight over value, values," *Austin American-Statesman*, May 25, 2007.

⁷ Phillips also says blacks "have legitimate concerns that should be debated, not dodged or dismissed as racist."

⁸ <http://transcripts.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/0706/12/l01.html>

- The competition and conflict frame is not a dominant frame in the African American press' news coverage.
- Readers of African American newspapers are being exposed to a range of political views through the publication of thoughtful op-eds and columns by African American leaders and thinkers who are writing about the immigration issue as it affects African Americans.
- The African American press has shown interest in stories about:
 - Black immigrants and refugees from Africa and the Caribbean;
 - Shared injustices (police abuse, low-wage workplace conditions, discrimination);
 - African American local officials who take pro-immigrant stances.

II. Search Methodology

We selected eleven African American news outlets based on circulation numbers and geographic distribution:

Chicago Defender
Atlanta Inquirer
Washington Afro-American
Philadelphia Tribune
Amsterdam News
LA Sentinel
Call & Post (Columbus, OH)
Bay State Banner (Boston, MA)
Michigan Citizen
Miami Times
Tri-State Defender (Memphis, TN)

Using the search terms “Immigrant” OR “Immigration” we used a random sequence generator to cull 15% of the articles returned to yield about 50 usable articles. The final number of usable articles included in the scan came to 43.

III. Topic Summaries

May-June 2006

Commentary (8)

This batch includes two pieces by Jesse Jackson, both published in *The LA Sentinel* in two consecutive editions in May 2006. In the first, Jackson argued passionately for unity between blacks and immigrants emphasizing the common struggle frame:

- “Immigrants of previous generations, including African Americans, should see the new undocumented workers as allies not threats. They share with African Americans a history of repression, of being subjected to back-breaking, soul deadening work-or no work at all. …People of color are brothers and sisters under and of the skin, whether we are called undocumented ‘Latino’ immigrants or ‘African Americans.’ No human being is ‘illegal.’ All human beings have human rights.” (“Si Se Puede means We Shall Overcome,” May 4-10, 2006)

In the second, he rebutted several common myths about Latino immigrants, charged that “the truth is often distorted in ways that feed our divisions,” and promoted a unity frame by reminding readers that the nation’s immigration policy is racially and ethnically discriminatory:

- “In the current atmosphere, we ignore the many contradictions of our immigration policy. Cuban immigrants are invited into America, welcomed and subsidized. They are pawns in our continuing cold War face-off with Fidel Castro. Immigrants from neighboring Haiti are locked out and shipped back. Vigilantes hunt immigrants coming over the Mexican border. But the Canadian border is basically unguarded, and undocumented immigrants from Canada raise no interest and are never called ‘illegals.’ Yet, so far as we know, the terrorists coming over the border have come through Canada, not through Mexico…We need comprehensive immigration reform. One that removes the discrimination that embraces Europeans and excludes Africans, or hunts Mexicans and hugs Canadians. But we should remember that America is a nation of immigrants—that’s a fact, not a legend.” (“Immigration: Myths and Reality,” May 11-17, 2006)

The LA-based columnist Earl Ofari Hutchinson also had two pieces during this timeframe, both in the *Chicago Defender*. Hutchinson’s columns focused on the political realities of immigration reform and only indirectly commented on the black/immigrant divide:

- Calling President Bush’s proposal “a humane, balanced immigration reform law” he predicts that Republican lawmakers will pass it for purely political reasons—to win the Latino vote. “Why Republicans will cave on immigration reform,” May 1-2, 2006)
- In his second column Hutchinson argued that bigger and stronger border fences and more agents have “not stopped thousands of desperate foreign workers from south of the border from getting in” nor have a few “showy

raids” by Homeland security and INS done much to stop the flow. “The issue,” he writes, “is still jobs and poverty...The millions who enter the U.S. legally or illegally come to work and escape poverty in their countries. Businesses, trade and manufacturing associations put the welcome mat out for them...” He concludes: “Bush’s tough talk on border security might cool some of Congress’ anger, but it’s a fool’s paradise measure that won’t put a dent in the illegal immigrant problem.” (“Bush’s border militarization foible,” May 22-23, 2006)

George Curry, the Editor-in-Chief of the NNPA News Service and BlackPressUSA.com used his column in *The Chicago Defender* to warn African Americans that their civil rights movement was being eclipsed by the immigrant rights movement. Comparing the huge turn-out for “Latino street demonstrations in more than 75 cities on April 10” with the small turnout of African Americans marching on the same day in New Orleans to protect the voting rights of displaced residents he wrote:

- “Let’s face it: There is eagerness on the part of many to focus on the growing Hispanic population and ignore the long-standing needs that Blacks are entitled to. It is our job, however, to stand up and be counted.” He calls for “Act II” of the civil rights movement. (“Another Day of Absence,” May 4, 2006)

News reports (5)

News coverage of the massive protests in May of 2006 was relatively sparse as was coverage of the immigration reform debate in Congress.

- **Protests:** An article in the *Amsterdam News* about the “Day Without Immigrants” focused on the role played by labor unions in planning and executing “the host of rallies, teach-ins, voter registration drives, boycotts, human chains and other activities from New York to Los Angeles. The article concluded with a quote from labor leader Hector Figueroa: “Noting rightwing opponents’ tendency to try to drive a wedge between the immigrants’ rights activists and the African American community by using the double-digit unemployment rate in that community as a justification for their extremist views, Figueroa concedes that it is important for everyone to see the immigrants’ rights movement as part of a continuum that includes the Civil Rights movement. He says, echoing a sentiment expressed by many labor leaders, ‘All workers suffer when one group of workers can be exploited.’” (“Labor’s role: A day without immigrants,” May 4-10, 2006)
- **Bush proposal:** Two papers published articles that treated the President’s reform proposal with favor. In *The Call & Post* reporter Ike Mgbatogu wrote: “President Bush gave a compelling speech to the nation on immigration reform Monday. He spoke forcefully and eloquently. Above all, he did not cave in to pressure from some in his party calling for jettisoning his

controversial ‘temporary guest worker’ proposal to appease his conservative minions and begin to reconnect with his disenchanted political base.” (May 18-24, 2006). *The Amsterdam News’ Caribbean Update* section carried an article quoting Rickford Burke, head of the Caribbean Guyana Institute for Democracy: “The president has set the tone for this debate, which is quite civil and humane.” (May 25-31, 2006)

October-December 2006

Commentary (3)

Rev. William D. Smart, Jr. of the LA Alliance for a New Economy and pastor of Faith Liberty Tabernacle published a piece in the *Sentinel* calling for unity among service industry workers:

- “African Americans once dominated the hospitality industry, but with the boom of immigrants migrating to the US in search of a better life for their families, blacks saw their numbers dwindle. Now, as hotel workers across the country demand better conditions, they are also joining with African Americans community leaders to insist that African Americans share the benefits of this effort to transform poverty-wage jobs into middle-class jobs...Both African Americans and immigrants have suffered under these conditions [low wage work and poverty]. It’s time for a change. With African Americans increasingly taking a leadership role in the battle for economic justice, the Black community as a whole is beginning to see some rays of hope. But this equality fight isn’t just a Black thing. It is something that unites all those seeking the betterment of our communities and this country.” (“Making Room at the Inn for our Community,” October 12-18, 2006)
- Beverly Julal and Clair Davis published an article entitled, “Nation enriched by its immigrants” in the Caribbean News! Section of the *Philadelphia Tribune* in which they criticized “anti-immigrant sentiments”: “The fact of the matter is that most immigrants do not take American jobs. The jobs that they fill are usually jobs that many Americans would prefer not to do or where labor shortages exist. A lot of them are farm workers. But even more importantly, many of them become entrepreneurs.” The article ended with a question and a plea: “Whose home is this anyway? History tells us that the only race of people that is native to this land in the American Indian. Others who call themselves Americans either migrated here willingly or were brought to this country in chains. Regardless of how we got here, we are all struggling to make a better future for ourselves and for our children. Can’t we all just get along?” (October 15, 2006)
- In his op-ed “Gangs and Street Power: The Facts and Faces of Gangs,” published in the LA *Sentinel*, writer/filmmaker Darryl James attacked the

“misperception that African Americans either started gangs, or that they are the majority of gang members in the nation.” Citing U.S. Department of Justice statistics, he pointed out that forty-seven per cent of gang members were Hispanic compared to thirty-one percent African American—“And a huge percentage of Hispanic gangs are illegal aliens.” James continued, “Is this a statement to somehow indict Hispanics or illegal immigrants? No, but it is a statement to stop the wholesale indictment of young Black men, who are more frequently targeted and misidentified as gang members than any other ethnic group in the nation.”

News reports (8)

- **Caribbean Focus:** Two of the newspapers have sections devoted to the Caribbean, the *Amsterdam News* and the *Philadelphia Tribune*. This batch of articles contained two pieces from the *Tribune* about that part of the world. “Jamaican expatriates help homeland grow” was about the founding of the U.S. Diaspora Advisory Board; “Debating regional ‘brain drain’” focused on the fact that 40 percent of the Caribbean community’s most educated nationals have migrated elsewhere.
- **Labor Focus:** Two articles in the *Amsterdam News* reported on labor struggles. “Rights group sues USICE” reported on a lawsuit filed by the Southern Poverty Law Center on behalf of Latino workers in Georgia who were victims of a raid by federal agents: “The series of raids across several towns in at least three counties lasted several weeks. They were ostensibly intended to locate undocumented immigrants who work in a poultry plant. Hundreds of residents were traumatized by the raids.” (November 9-15, 2006) The second article had a common struggle theme: “The 5,500 Black and Latino workers who slave away in the world’s largest hog slaughterhouse have won a major victory.” In a description of a two-day walk out at Smithfield Packing the story pointed out, “Smithfield workers have long voiced outrage over harsh working conditions that included brutally fast production lines, crippling injuries and a climate that pitted Black workers against newly arrived low-wage Latino immigrants.” (December 7-13, 2006)

April-June, 2007

Commentary (7)

- A syndicated column by Bill Fletcher, Jr., the past president of TransAfrica Forum, was published in the *Chicago Defender* and the *Miami Times*. “Immigration broadening the reparations debate” gives an anti-imperialist analysis of migration from the Global South to western industrialized countries and stresses the communalities between the descendants of African slaves and the victims of “gunboat diplomacy” in Latin America: “We, African Americans who support reparations for African Americans as a result

of slavery and Jim Crow segregation, argue that central to this demand is the recognition that a fundamental wrong was done to us and that the damage has never been fully, or even significantly, repaired... The same question, albeit with different facts, applies when we are thinking about people coming from the Global South to the USA.”

- Judge Greg Mathis, national vice president of Rainbow PUSH published an op-ed in the *Miami Times* entitled, “Black people want to make a living.” It points to the rising unemployment rates in the black community and takes issue with the guest worker proposal: “It comes as a slap in the face that many believe a guest worker program is the solution to the country’s worker shortage...The thinking behind the [guest worker] program makes sense – the U.S. wants to give those who come to our country an opportunity to earn a living and provide for their families. But what about Blacks, on whose backs the wealth of this nation was built?”
- “The immigration divide” by Lee H. Walker, president of The New Coalition for Economic & Social Change” was published by the *Chicago Defender*. In it, the author confronted the black/immigrant divide directly: “Moderate and conservative Democrats seem to be in favor of comprehensive immigration reform, while a smaller group of Democrats, including many Black leaders, are opposed...With respect to the racial dynamic, most Blacks in political and community leadership are opposed to immigration based on the conventional wisdom that the low skilled workers coming across the border from Mexico are taking jobs from Blacks and the poor. However, recent studies do not support this theory.” Walker argued that “the solution to Black’s economic woes is not turning back immigrants; it is equipping native Blacks with the basic skills and attitudes towards work that will enable them to compete. It is truer now than ever before that education is the best road to freedom...rather than relying on an abundance of low-skilled jobs.” He concluded that “Blacks should not feel threatened by low-skilled immigrants who arrive without even being able to speak the language. If we focus on education and entrepreneurship, we can thrive alongside the immigrants.”
- An editorial in the Columbus *Call & Post* observed that the issue of immigration “is a tangled one for all Americans – and particularly, in many ways, for African Americans.” It argued that the economic concerns of African Americans are legitimate—jobs in some industries are being shifted to immigrant labor. But it cautioned readers about aligning themselves with “nativists” like Pat Buchanan and Bill O’Reilly “who do not have the interests of African Americans at heart...African Americans have a legitimate interest in ensuring that a job market that could offer upward mobility in tough times, at least at the bottom, is not flooded by illegal labor designed to keep wages cheap. At the same time, we must be careful that we do not find ourselves aligned with those whose interests may be totally antagonistic to our own.”

- Marc Morial, President of the National Urban League, published an op-ed in the *Chicago Defender* following the demise of the “grand bargain.” Titled, “Failure of U.S. Senate to pass immigration compromise is blessing in disguise,” Morial argued that if passed, the legislation would have “undermined labor protections for all workers and would have exacted a great toll on an already frayed social safety net.” He explained that the Urban League’s greatest concern revolved around the temporary worker provision which would “produce a new class of exploited workers” and argued that native American workers should have the “first right to jobs employers are seeking temporary visas for.”

News Reports (14)

- **Urban growth:** An article in the *Philadelphia Tribune*, “Immigrants keep metro population growing,” reports on a study by the Population Reference Bureau showing that but for the increase in immigrants, the populations of big and small metro areas would be shrinking. The article explains, “Many demographers associate shrinking populations with economic problems, typically poor job markets or prohibitive housing prices (sic)” and quotes William Frey, a demographer at the Brookings Institute: “A lot of cities rely on immigration to prop up their housing market and prop up their economics. But the article concludes with a quote from Steven Camarota (Center for Immigration Studies): “Don’t we have concerns about congestion and sprawl and pollution?” For a piece in the *Bay State Banner* the reporter interviewed people who congregated at the Butterfly Café, “the epicenter of a small but active community of Somali political refugees in Boston.” The article traced some of the history of the internecine conflict in Somalia and quoted a leader from the Somali Development Center: “We concentrate on the youth and women, emphasizing the great new opportunities they have in this country...”
- **Police shooting:** Two articles in the *Amsterdam News* covered the police shooting of an unarmed immigrant from Honduras. “A dreamer returns home in a casket” by Herb Boyd quoted Rev. Al Sharpton who delivered a eulogy at the funeral: “Rather than finding the American dream he experienced the American nightmare.” The second article reported on a meeting between the grieving family and the Bronx DA—“Arzu’s family, residents and local activists raise suspicions over the NYPD’s perceived tendency to favor killing young Black men, given the recent shooting of Sean Bell and many others before and since.”
- **Unfair policies and practices:** A number of articles described unfair and discriminatory practices. The *Amsterdam News*’ Caribbean Update section carried a story about a personal appeal by the Bishop of the Episcopal Church to President Bush on behalf of 101 Haitian migrants who entered the country illegally: “Returning the migrants to Haiti would be a cruel and unjust act.” The article makes the point that Haitians, unlike Cubans, do not benefit from

the “wet foot, dry land” policy and are sent back despite their asylum claims. A *Miami Times* article, “Immigrants: Jailed like criminals,” describes the plight of Marlene Jaggernauth, “a 42-year-old single mother from Trinidad who has been a permanent citizen in the U.S. since the age of 12. Four years ago, she was pulled from her home and handcuffed in front of her four children for a crime [shoplifting] she committed in the 1990s.” The article quotes Cheryl Little of the Florida Immigrant Advocacy Center: “Immigrants represent the fastest growing prison population in the nation due to the current immigration law....They have no rights and are often treated poorly and inhumanely.” A second *Miami Times* article focused on litigation against workplace English-only rules: “The number of charges filed with the federal EEOC alleging discrimination based on English-only policies is small, but six times as large as 10 years ago.” It cites a \$900,000 settlement against a New York-based geriatric center that barred Haitian employees from speaking Creole while allowing other foreign languages to be spoken.

- **Pro-reform public officials:** The *Miami Times* ran an article about County Commissioner Audrey Edmonson leading a delegation of members of the Miami Community Relations Board and leaders of local advocacy groups to Washington “to educate members of Congress about our community’s priorities for fair and just immigration reform.” Edmonson is quoted as saying, “The diversity that exists in Miami-Dade County is reflective of the future of our nation. We have and continue to benefit enormously from the great contributions of those who have migrated to our county. We are an example to the rest of the nation.” An article in the *Call & Post*, “Coleman meets with African immigrants,” described a lunch meeting at which Mayor Michael Coleman of Columbus hosted African community leaders to discuss their concerns. “With a trio of professors Malik Ba of Columbus State, Emeka Aniagolu of Ohio Wesleyan and Abdi Mahmoud with the Ohio Department of Education speaking for the group, it was suggested that something be done to ease the constant tension and antagonism plaguing African immigrants and American Blacks.” Columbus is described in the article as a “welcoming city” with a “jocular and popular mayor.”
- **Immigration policy debate:** There were only two news articles about the Senate debate. A 500-word piece in the June 8-10 edition of the *Chicago Defender* gave a straightforward report on the demise of the “grand bargain,” quoting Senators Reid and McConnell. An article in the June 14-20 edition of the *Amsterdam News* entitled “Immigration bill dumped, Labor ponders next steps” focused on the labor movement’s opposition to the guest worker program. It contained strong quotes from several labor leaders:
 - “We are a nation of citizens, not of guests.” Terry O’Sullivan, Laborers
 - “All workers deserve immigration reform that respects the fundamental American values of inclusion and democracy. While undocumented workers lack the path to participate in U.S. democracy and achieve the

American dream, their unscrupulous employers play our dysfunctional immigration system for their own gain.” United Food and Commercial Workers Union statement

- “As long as employers have access to a class of workers that they can prevent from exercising their rights by merely asking a simple question: ‘Do you have papers?’”, the incentive to exploit will continue. One key to removing that incentive is to regularize the status of the undocumented population through inclusive, practical and swift legalization.” Jon Hiatt, AFL-CIO

IV. Analysis

1. News coverage—no dominant frame

In comparison with the mainstream media, the African American press devoted very little space to the immigration policy debate—with its emphasis on Hispanics in general and Mexicans in particular—in its news reporting in 2006-2007. Of the 27 usable news articles in our scan, only three covered the debate in Congress (and the coverage was perfunctory), and only two covered the mass immigrant rights demonstrations in May 2006. To the extent that immigrant issues received much attention, issues affecting immigrants from Africa and the Caribbean were more often the focus, *e.g.*:

- “Bishop calls for asylum for Haitians” (*Amsterdam News*)
- “Somali refugees congregate, caffeinate at Butterfly Café” (*Bay State Banner*)
- “Coleman meets with African immigrants” (*Call & Post*)
- “Jamaican expatriates help homeland grow” (*Philadelphia Tribune*)
- “Congolese man speaks out against immigration proposals” (*Chicago Defender*)

The competition/conflict frame was not dominant or even present in the news coverage of immigrants and immigration. The black-immigrant divide was alluded to in only one article—about the May 1, 2006 protests—in a quote from a Latino labor leader:

“Noting rightwing opponents’ tendency to try to drive a wedge between the immigrant rights activists and the African American community by using the double-digit unemployment rate in that community as justification for their extremely views, Figueroa [Hector Figueroa, Vice President of SEIU Local 32BJ] concedes that it is important for everyone to see the immigrant rights movement as part of a continuum that includes the Civil Rights movement. He says, echoing a sentiment expressed by many labor leaders, ‘All workers suffer when one group of workers can be exploited.’” (*Amsterdam News*)

There were no news articles that focused on or even mentioned the issue of competition for low-wage jobs.

Several articles did have a common struggle frame. The *Amsterdam News*' coverage of the fatal police shooting of an unarmed Honduran immigrant in New York emphasized the solidarity between Sean Bell's family, who were present at the funeral, and the family of Fermin Arzu, the immigrant who was killed. Another *Amsterdam News* article covered a two-day walkout over harsh working conditions in a Tar Heel, North Carolina hog slaughterhouse in which black and Latino workers united in spite of "a climate that pitted Black workers against newly arrived low-wage Latino immigrants" to win major concessions from management.

It's worth drawing attention to two articles that headlined the pro-immigrant policies of local African American political leaders. The *Call & Post* ran an upbeat story about Columbus Mayor Michael Coleman's meeting with leaders of that city's African immigrant community at which "it was suggested that something be done to ease the constant tension and antagonism plaguing African immigrants and American blacks." Mayor Coleman's "New American" initiative for "addressing the concerns of a city experiencing a migration boom" was favorably mentioned. An article in the *Miami Times*, "Edmonson takes immigration reform to Washington," describes the efforts of Audrey Edmonson, an African American Dade County Commissioner "to educate members of Congress about our community's priorities for fair and just immigration reform." Edmonson is quoted as saying, "We have and continue to benefit enormously from the great contributions of those who have migrated to our country. We are an example to the rest of the nation."

2. Commentary—confronting the black-immigrant divide

Almost half of the articles in our scan were commentary and unlike the news reports, many of these op-eds, columns and editorials confronted the black-immigrant divide directly. Overall, they tended to be thoughtful pieces that examined deep systemic causes and effects, and they are worth quoting extensively. The authors represented a range of opinion in the African American community, but none were stridently anti-immigrant and many promoted a common struggle/common heritage frame. These last included two op-eds by Jesse Jackson, a syndicated column by Bill Fletcher, Jr., and a column by Rev. William D. Smart, Jr., director of the LA Alliance for a New Economy and pastor of the Faith Liberty Tabernacle.

Jesse Jackson's "'Si Se Puede' Means We Shall Overcome" argued forcefully for unity among all low-wage workers as the best strategy for raising everyone's boats. He urged his readers not to blame immigrants for their economic problems and worries but to direct their anger at "global corporations" and their servants in Washington. He reminded readers of this country's history of anti-immigrant anger and rhetoric and warned of new violence against immigrants. He pointed out that besides sharing common hopes and dreams ("a better future for their children") African Americans and today's undocumented workers "share a common heritage":

"Less than ten percent of enslaved Africans ended up in the United States. The vast majority were shipped to Latin America and the West Indies. Numerous

Asian workers were also brought to the Caribbean and Latin America to serve as cheap labor. People of color are brothers and sisters under and of the skin, whether we are called undocumented ‘Latino’ immigrants or ‘African Americans.’”

Fletcher’s column, which ran in both the *Miami Times* and the *Chicago Defender*, also pointed out the common heritage of African Americans and Latinos in the context of colonialism’s role in “turning nations of the Global South into nations of migrants.” He observed that those who support reparations for African Americans base their argument on “the recognition that a fundamental wrong was done to us and that the damage has never been fully, or even significantly, repaired.” The same logic, Fletcher wrote, applies to today’s immigrants:

“We simply cannot pretend that people are coming to the USA because of the dream of golden paved streets. They are coming here in large part because their chance to live their own lives in their homes—where they would rather stay—has been undermined by what government after government in the Western world, including but not limited to the U.S. government, have done to these regions.”

In “Making Room at the Inn for our Community” published in the *Sentinel* Rev. William D. Smart, Jr. celebrated a UNITE HERE victory for service workers at the Beverly Hilton and wrote:

“African Americans once dominated the hospitality industry, but with the boom of immigrants migrating to the US in search of a better life for their families, blacks saw their numbers dwindle. Now, as hotel workers across the country demand better conditions, they are also joining with African American community leaders to insist that African Americans share the benefits of this effort to transform poverty-wage jobs into middle-class jobs. Both African Americans and immigrants have suffered under these conditions. It’s time for a change....This equality fight isn’t just a Black thing. It is something that unites all those seeking the betterment of our communities and this country.”

Some opinion pieces targeted President Bush’s guest worker proposal for special criticism on the ground that if adopted, it would hurt African Americans. Marc Morial of the National Urban League published a piece in the *Chicago Defender* in June of 2007 entitled, “Failure of U.S. Senate to pass immigration compromise is a blessing in disguise.” Expressing concern about the proposal that would allow U.S.-based companies to bring as many as 200,000 foreign-born guest workers a year into the nation Morial argued:

“Any effort to issue these temporary worker visas should be narrowly tailored and combined with a requirement that the nation’s current workers—Black, white, Hispanic, Asian or Native American—be given the first right to jobs employers are seeking temporary visas for.”

Judge Greg Mathis of SCLC's piece, "Black people want to make a living," was published in the June 6-12 2007 issue of the *Miami Times*. He conceded that the "thinking behind the [guest worker] program makes sense—the U.S. wants to give those who come to our country an opportunity to earn a living provide for their families" but pointedly asked:

"But what about Blacks, on whose backs the wealth of this nation was built? Much of this shortage of skilled workers can be blamed by the government's inability to provide an adequate public education system that equally prepares young people for the college and the workforce. We got ourselves into the mess, and we need to get ourselves out of it. The guest worker program is one way. But Blacks should not be excluded from the solution."

Several commentators urged readers to reject anti-immigrant ideas and to refrain from aligning themselves with those who do not have the interests of African Americans at heart. Lee H. Walker, President of the New Coalition for Economic and Social Change, published an op-ed in the *Chicago Defender* in June 2007 in which he observed that "it is a well known fact among Blacks that America's free market system has had a longstanding preference for immigrant labor over indigenous Black workers" and that "immigration policy has always uncovered a form of discrimination and/or racism, and this present debate is no exception":

"Now we are beginning to hear comments like 'Blacks and whites will have to band together to protect our country from the immigrants.' Unfortunately, I hate to admit that some Blacks are buying into this...The solution to Blacks' economic woes is not turning back immigrants; it is equipping native Blacks with the basic skills and attitudes towards work that will enable them to compete. Education is the best road to freedom."

In a thoughtful editorial published in mid-June 2007 during the height of the immigration debate, the *Call & Post* observed that "the issue of immigration is a tangled one for all Americans—and particularly for African Americans":

"Contrary to what President Bush has said, illegal immigrants are working in jobs that Americans have always done: processing carcasses in meat-packing plants; working as roofers and other laborers on construction sites; performing landscaping services; working in hotels and restaurants of all types and sizes....during the rebuilding in New Orleans in the wake of Katrina, there were complaints that local African American workers were not being hired by contractors in favor of undocumented workers from across the border...At the same time, many African Americans may be uncomfortable with the attitude and language of some of the most strident opponents of the 'grand bargain' on immigration. Consider the words of conservatives such as Pat Buchanan and Bill O'Reilly...When these nativists speak, it is clear that they do not have the interests of African Americans at heart."

Public Opinion Analysis

I. Major Findings

- African Americans are more supportive of immigrant rights than whites when it comes to issues of discrimination, unfairness and injustice.
- African Americans are more fearful than whites of negative economic effects of immigration both on the country as a whole and on their own job opportunities.
- Longitudinal research suggests that African American public opinion is shifting in the direction of more negative attitudes and beliefs about immigration and immigrants.

II. Analysis

In July 2007 the Leadership Conference commissioned a series of four African American focus groups in Detroit and Houston. Participants included men and women from both blue collar and white collar backgrounds. Many of the findings were disturbing.⁹

- African American participants view immigrants as economic competitors who are taking jobs and lowering wages.
- In addition to economic pressures, African American participants report some cultural anxiety typically associated with more conservative whites.
- Stereotypes about immigrants persist, and the perception that immigrants unfairly take from the system is widespread.
- Participants do associate some good qualities with immigrants, but it comes mostly in the form of grudging respect and admiration.
- Participants in the African American groups believe that discrimination is alive and well in America and that African Americans are the most discriminated against. While they believe Latinos are the second most discriminated against they do not feel a sense of “shared” or “linked” fate and reject the idea that “we’re all in it together.”
- Participants want “tough enforcement” meaning tougher border controls, tougher enforcement of employment laws, and more stringent requirements for legalization.

Available quantitative public opinion research does not paint as bleak a picture, but does indicate that African American opinion is moving in the direction of the

⁹ Unpublished Memorandum from Lake Research Partners, July 25, 2007.

attitudes and beliefs uncovered in the focus groups. The data suggest that the negative frame of conflict and competition between blacks and immigrants, found in both mainstream media coverage and black talk radio, although not in the black press, is having an impact.

In March 2006 the Pew Research Center and Pew Hispanic Center published a report on their recent survey, “No Consensus on Immigration Problem or Proposed Fixes: America’s Immigration Quandary.¹⁰ The survey analyzed the data by race and ethnicity and found that with only one exception, blacks either felt the same as whites, or they were more receptive to immigrant rights than were whites. The one exception was a question about jobs indicating that blacks were significantly more concerned about competition over jobs than were whites:

Q. Do you think that the immigrants coming into this country today mostly take jobs away from American citizens, or do they mostly take jobs Americans don’t want?

	<u>Take jobs Americans don’t want</u>	<u>Take jobs away from Americans</u>
White	65	25
Black	54	33
Hispanic	81	9

Blacks were more supportive of social services for “illegal immigrants” than whites, although a bare majority did agree that immigrants should be ineligible:

Q. Should illegal immigrants who are in the U.S. be eligible for social services provided by state and local governments?

	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>
White	20	76
Black	43	54
Hispanic	64	33

And they were strongly in favor of public education for immigrant children:

Q. Should the children of illegal immigrants who are in the U.S. be permitted to attend public schools?

	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>
White	67	31

¹⁰ “No Consensus on Immigration Problem or Proposed Fixes: America’s Immigration Quandary,” Pew Research Center for the People & the Press/Pew Hispanic Center (March 30, 2006), based on a nationwide sample of 2,000 adults 18 years of age or older conducted from February 8-March 7, 2006.

Black	79	21
Hispanic	93	4

Blacks opposed a constitutional amendment barring citizenship to children of illegal immigrants by a 60% majority, compared to 47% of whites:

Q. Should we amend the Constitution to bar citizenship to children of illegal immigrants?

	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>
White	47	50
Black	36	60
Hispanic	23	74

Responses to Gallup's annual Minority Rights and Relations survey¹¹ indicate that black public opinion is gradually becoming more negative with respect to the effect of immigration on the country as a whole. Over the past seven years African American opinion has shifted 15 percent in the direction of support for decreasing immigration levels.

Q. In your view, should immigration be kept at its present level, increased or decreased?

	<u>Present</u>	<u>Increased</u>	<u>Decreased</u>
6/07	29%	21%	46% ¹²
6/06	35	21	39
6/05	32	18	44
6/04	34	15	47
6/03	33	20	44
6/02	34	16	46
6/01	42	24	31

And an eight point shift in the direction of immigration being “a bad thing for the country.”

Q. On the whole, do you think immigration is a good thing or a bad thing for the country today?

	<u>Good</u>	<u>Bad</u>
6/07	55	36 ¹³
6/06	60	35

¹¹ Based on nationwide sample of 2,300 adults, including over-samplings of non-Hispanic blacks.

¹² In 2007 the responses of non-Hispanic whites were 35% present level, 12% increased, and 48% decreased; the difference between 46% and 48% is statistically insignificant.

¹³ White responses to this question were not significantly different from black responses. In 2007 59% of whites responded “good”; 35% responded “bad.”

6/05	55	36
6/03	48	45
6/02	46	46
6/01	61	28

They are also becoming more fearful on a personal level. In 2007, eleven percent more blacks felt immigrants were hurting their job opportunities than in 2001.

Q. Are immigrants making job opportunities for you and your family better, worse, or not having much effect?

	<u>Better</u>	<u>Worse</u>	<u>No effect</u>
6/07	11	49	37
6/04	9	49	39
6/02	14	48	36
6/01	20	38	41

Over the same time span there was a 13% increase in the percentage of blacks who thought immigrants were having a negative effect on the economy overall.

Q. Are immigrants making the economy in general better, worse, no effect?

	<u>Better</u>	<u>Worse</u>	<u>No effect</u>
6/07	22	52	21
6/04	16	47	31
6/02	25	47	24
6/01	27	39	31

Recommendations

In spite of a declining readership since its heyday in the 1960s, the African American press is an important vehicle for communicating with a segment of the African American public—a segment which, according to the National Newspaper Publisher's Association, is well-educated and civically engaged. Immigrant rights activists should develop and execute a proactive strategy to influence readers of the black press and use access to the press as a springboard for increasing their exposure on popular black websites and radio shows.

1. Generate and submit op-eds from respected African American thinkers and leaders that respond to the African American public's fears and promote the shared heritage/common struggle frame.

Advocacy around issues affecting the African American community is a central mission of the black press. Advocates can take advantage of the willingness of these newspapers to publish thoughtful opinion pieces on the immigration issue—the more, the

better. New studies that explain the actual economic impact of immigrants on the employment opportunities of African Americans should be summarized and clearly presented in op-ed form. Op-ed authors should include local black public officials like Mayor Michael Coleman of Columbus, Ohio who can explain why his city welcomes new immigrants. Advocates should pitch story ideas to columnists who are already syndicated and who adopt a common heritage/common struggle frame (e.g., Bill Fletcher, Jr. and Earl Ofari Hutchinson).

2. Look for and pitch stories that show concretely how unity between immigrants and African Americans can lift all boats.

Our scan suggests that reporters for black newspapers are receptive to positive stories about real life cooperation between blacks and immigrants. Advocates should seek out and pitch story ideas that emphasize cooperation. The labor movement is good place to look, and African American labor leaders who are actively promoting cooperation would be good sources of information. Workplace struggles in which blacks and Latinos band together for a common purpose make the common struggle frame come to life and undercut fears of competition over jobs. Other areas where blacks and immigrants come together and fight for common goals, e.g., racial profiling and police abuse, environmental racism, health and education inequities, should be mined for story ideas and pitched to reporters.

3. Use the African American press as a springboard for access to black websites and radio and TV shows.

A critical mass of coverage and commentary in the black press will enhance advocates' access to more far-reaching forms of communication with the African American public. The Tom Joyner Morning Show, for example, has an estimated eight million listeners in any given week in about 120 markets where the show is syndicated.¹⁴ Joyner has a wide range of guests on his four-hour show, from entertainers to scholars, and would very likely be amenable to discussion of bridging the black-immigrant divide. Tavis Smiley's show on PBS is another obvious target.

¹⁴ Felicia Lee, "Building a Conversation, One Radio Show at a Time," *New York Times*, February 13, 2007. Joyner also presides over BlackAmericaWeb.com which he launched in 2001. The website is described as "a broad-based effort to become a timely and credible source for news and information covering all aspects of daily life, featuring a wide array of viewpoints and perspectives."

<http://www.blackamericaweb.com/site.aspx/misce/aboutus>