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Abolitionist Community Economic Development: Dismantling Racial Capital and Forging Black Autonomous Futures

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*This Note explores Abolitionist Community Economic Development (ACED) as a potential model for radical reform aimed at addressing entrenched racial and economic injustices in Black communities. This Note argues that traditional Community Economic Development (CED) projects often fall short of addressing the root causes of social and economic injustice in Black communities, as they tend to rely on external investment, risk triggering gentrification, and lack focus on redistributing power and rectifying historical injustices. In contrast, ACED emphasizes community ownership, long-term resilience, and direct control over resources, providing a more sustainable and empowering approach to tackling systemic inequalities. Using the framework established by Mabre Stahly-Butts and Amna Akbar in *Reforms for Radicals? An Abolitionist Framework*, this Note examines ACED initiatives like *Cooperation Jackson* and *The Guild* to assess their alignment with criteria for genuine radical change. This analysis demonstrates the potential of ACED to empower Black communities and proposes policy implications for scaling such models.*

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INTRODUCTION

Urban renewal and redevelopment policies in the United States during the 1960s and 1970s were centered on revitalizing downtown areas, stimulating economic growth, and modernizing cities to attract business activity and wealthy

residents.¹ Government actions such as the Housing Act of 1949 and 1954, the abuse of eminent domain, and exclusionary zoning practices disproportionately affected communities of color and low-income populations.² Displacement severed the social networks of these communities and exacerbated economic inequality. In response, community economic development (CED) efforts in the United States emerged, characterized as a time of profound social and economic change marked by the Civil Rights Movement, urban unrest, and increasing awareness of poverty and inequality. CED aimed to empower communities through self-determined economic initiatives, preservation of affordable housing, and grassroots planning efforts to counter these destructive policies.³ President Lyndon B. Johnson's War on Poverty, launched in 1964, was instrumental in shaping CED through initiatives such as the Economic Opportunity Act and the creation of Community Action Agencies, which aimed to tackle social and economic injustices at the local level.⁴ CED has risen as a strategy to empower low-income communities by fostering local economic growth, creating jobs, and advancing social equity. It encompasses initiatives such as affordable housing development, small business support, workforce training, and community organizing. The overarching aim is to build effective and inclusive economic opportunities that prioritize the needs of historically marginalized populations.⁵

While numerous CED initiatives throughout the United States have had success in addressing immediate challenges faced by marginalized communities, the limitations of incremental progress through reformist approaches highlight the need for more profound transformations.⁶ While grounded in the foundational goals of CED, radical change pushes further by not only addressing immediate needs but by dismantling and replacing the systems and structures that perpetuate inequality and oppression. It envisions a deeper reimagining of social, economic, and political relations rooted in justice, democracy, and liberation.⁷

Radical change signifies a fundamental and comprehensive transformation of the existing social, economic, and political structures and relations that produce and reproduce oppression, exploitation, and inequality.⁸ Radical change challenges the

1. *Urban Renewal Timeline*, NAT'L POVERTY PLAN, <https://nationalpovertyplan.org/timeline/urban-renewal/#:~:text=The%20Housing%20Act%20of%201949,for%20redevelopment%20through%20private%20developers> [perma.cc/3KCE-UM8L] (last visited Jan. 16, 2025).

2. *Id.*

3. See WILLIAM H. SIMON, *THE COMMUNITY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT MOVEMENT: LAW, BUSINESS, AND THE NEW SOCIAL POLICY* 69–112 (2002).

4. Economic Opportunity Act of 1964, Pub. L. No. 88–452, § 202, 78 Stat. 508, 516; NASCSP, NAT'L ASS'N FOR STATE CMTY. SERVS. PROGRAMS (NASCSP), *COMMUNITY SERVICES NETWORK: THE COMMUNITY SERVICES BLOCK GRANT IN ACTION*, FISCAL YEAR 2000 (2001).

5. Community Services Block Grant Act § 672, 42 U.S.C. § 9901 (2000). The purpose of the Act aligns with CED principles: aiding communities, collaborating with community action agencies and neighborhood-based organizations to reduce poverty, revitalizing low-income communities, and empowering low-income families and individuals in both rural and urban areas to promote self-sufficiency.

6. Sameer Ashar, *Deep Critique and Democratic Lawyering*, 104 CALIF. L. REV. 201, 217–19 (2016) (defining deep critique as “thinking beneath and beyond liberal legalist approaches to social problems”).

7. Amna A. Akbar, *Toward a Radical Imagination of Law*, 93 N.Y.U. L. REV. 405, 413 (2018).

8. See generally Flor Avelino, *Theories of Power and Social Change: Power Contestations and Their Implications for Research on Social Change and Innovation*, 14 J. POL. POWER 425 (2021), <https://doi.org/10.1080/2158379X.2021.1875307> [perma.cc/AU24-BHU2].

dominant ideologies, institutions, and interests that maintain the status quo and seeks to create alternative visions and practices that are rooted in the values of justice, democracy, and liberation.⁹ Radical change is not merely a matter of reforming or improving the existing system but of dismantling and replacing it with a new one that serves the needs and aspirations of the oppressed and marginalized.

CED projects are often reformist in nature when they work within existing economic and social systems to address inequalities without fundamentally challenging the structures that produce those inequalities. While these projects undoubtedly provide meaningful benefits to marginalized communities, their reliance on or alignment with the status quo limits their ability to achieve transformative change.¹⁰ The field of CED, particularly in its application to Black communities, would be profoundly enriched by reimagining its approach. Embracing a radical, abolitionist framework for CED offers the potential to deliver more meaningful and lasting benefits to these communities while directly addressing the root causes of the systemic harms that persist under traditional models. Black communities have historically faced and continue to face multiple forms of violence, discrimination, and dispossession that have deprived them of their land, labor, wealth, culture, and dignity. The legacies of slavery, colonialism, Jim Crow, redlining, mass incarceration, police brutality, and environmental racism have created a system of racial capitalism that exploits and excludes Black people from the benefits and opportunities of the mainstream economy and society.¹¹ As a result, Black communities experience elevated levels of poverty, unemployment, homelessness, health inequities, educational disparities, and political marginalization.

To address these social harms, Black communities need more than incremental or cosmetic changes that merely tinker with the symptoms of the problem.¹² Traditional methods of CED often fall short of achieving true, lasting radical reform for several reasons. First, they tend to focus on surface-level economic benefits rather than structural change, which means they do not address the underlying systems of oppression. Second, these methods often rely on external investment, creating dependency rather than fostering self-sufficiency. Third, traditional approaches can make communities vulnerable to gentrification, displacing the very people they aim to help. Fourth, there is often a lack of focus on power redistribution, which is crucial for achieving genuine equity. Finally, traditional methods usually have a short-term focus rather than building long-term community resilience. Black communities need radical change that confronts and challenges the root causes of the problem, namely the interlocking systems of white supremacy, patriarchy, and capitalism that structure and shape the distribution of power and resources in society. There is a need for radical change that empowers and enables them to reclaim and rebuild their communities according to their own visions and

9. *Id.*

10. See generally THE POLITICS OF LAW: A PROGRESSIVE CRITIQUE (David Kairys ed., 1982); STUART A. SCHEINGOLD, THE POLITICS OF RIGHTS: LAWYERS, PUBLIC POLICY, AND POLITICAL CHANGE 14–21 (Univ. of Mich. 2d ed. 2004) (1974) (identifying the law-politics divide as a cornerstone of America's self-conceptualization of governance and putting the strong “myth of rights” in American political thinking in conversation with the “politics of rights”).

11. Mari J. Matsuda, *Public Response to Racist Speech: Considering the Victim's Story*, 87 MICH. L. REV. 2320, 2323–24 (1989).

12. Robert M. Cover, *Nomos and Narrative*, 97 HARV. L. REV. 9 (1983).

values, rather than those imposed by external forces or elites. The community needs radical change that fosters and facilitates their collective self-determination, autonomy, and solidarity, rather than their dependency, subordination, and fragmentation.

One way to pursue radical change in CED is to integrate an abolitionist approach that draws inspiration and lessons from the historical and contemporary struggles of Black people for freedom and justice.¹³ A radical, abolitionist approach is based on the premise that the existing system of racial capitalism is not only unjust and oppressive but also unsustainable and irreformable.¹⁴ Therefore, ACED promotes structural change by fostering community-owned businesses and cooperatives that prioritize self-ownership and economic democracy among Black Americans. ACED places a stronger focus on who controls decision-making and how deeply existing power structures are challenged. By shifting ownership and governance directly to community members, ACED empowers individuals to address systemic inequalities from within and build wealth that stays within the community. A radical, abolitionist approach also recognizes that Black communities are not homogeneous or monolithic, but diverse and complex, with multiple and intersecting identities, experiences, and needs that must be continuously cultivated for the community to steadily progress. ACED recognizes that Black communities can fully exercise self-governance and economic sovereignty, while remaining in solidarity with other marginalized groups. This is accomplished through mutual interests and shared goals based on principles of self-determination. For radical change to occur, a fundamental transformation of systems is required rather than surface-level adjustments, especially when it comes to addressing the deep-seated social and economic harms faced by Black communities in the United States.¹⁵ In their Article, *Reforms for Radicals: An Abolitionist Framework*, Marbre Stahly-Butts and Amna A. Akbar outline the criteria that define a project as “radical reform.”¹⁶ According to their framework, a reform must (1) dismantle harmful systems; (2) adopt alternative political, economic, and social structures that envision new possibilities; (3) transfer power to those most impacted by systemic harm, often Black, Brown, and working-class communities; (4) address and repair past injustices; and (5) improve material conditions for the impacted community.¹⁷ ACED initiatives meet these criteria by creating community-centered, self-sustaining economic systems where Black communities can potentially gain economic control, resist exploitation, and create long-term wealth. ACED can significantly benefit Black communities, enabling them to break free from cycles of economic marginalization and inequity. But does such a framework exist in practice within the

13. NAOMI MURAKAWA, *THE FIRST CIVIL RIGHT: HOW LIBERALS BUILT PRISON AMERICA* 154 (2014) (“Administrative tinkering does not confront the damning features of the American carceral state, its scale and its racial concentration . . . Without a normatively grounded understanding of racial violence, liberal reforms will do the administrative shuffle.”).

14. *Id.*

15. Rachel Herzing, “*Tweaking Armageddon*”: *The Potential and Limits of Conditions of Confinement Campaigns*, 41 SOC. JUST. 190, 194 (2014) (asserting that traditional reform efforts “run the risk of exceptionalizing or isolating negative elements of the system while normalizing its overall operation and underwriting its future”).

16. Marbre Stahly-Butts & Amna A. Akbar, *Reforms for Radicals: An Abolitionist Framework*, 68 UCLA L. REV. 1544 (2022).

17. *Id.*

United States today? This Note will explore two prominent examples, Cooperation Jackson in Mississippi and The Guild in Atlanta, to examine whether these initiatives exemplify Black-led ACED and the potential for radical reform in line with Stahley-Butts's and Akbar's criteria.

This Note develops this argument and analysis in four parts. Part I of this Note aims to understand radical reform within the context of Stahley-Butts's and Akbar's framework.¹⁸ Part II dives into the conceptual benefits of ACED, emphasizing its alignment with radical reform by fostering self-sufficiency, economic control, and collective wealth-building in Black communities. Part III examines two modern-day examples of Black-led ACED in the United States and analyzes how they fit within the five criteria in Stahley-Butts's and Akbar's framework. Finally, Part IV discusses the implications of ACED as a model for radical reform and discusses how we might scale and expand the movement.

I. UNDERSTANDING THE CONCEPT OF RADICAL REFORM IN AN ABOLITIONIST FRAMEWORK

When addressing systemic harms and structural inequities that limit the mobility of a marginalized group, abolitionist principles and radical reform are deeply interconnected. While abolitionism focuses on completely dismantling harmful systems, radical reform serves as a method to operationalize abolitionist goals by creating practical and transformative alternatives. It is important to note that adopting an abolitionist ethic¹⁹ will not result in a perfect solution to curing equity gaps in society. Rather, it leads us to a more direct path to thinking about how we can attack the root causes of socioeconomic disparities which the Black community is subjected to. This is in stark contrast to adopting a cyclical, procedural approach to addressing harms that merely responds to issues as they arise, failing to dismantle the underlying systems that perpetuate inequality and allowing the same injustices to resurface in different forms. By adhering to abolitionist principles, radical reform refuses to settle for performative or remedial adjustments that maintain the status quo.²⁰ Instead, it focuses on reconstructing the very systems that perpetuate harm, ensuring that solutions are both sustainable and centered on empowering those most impacted by systemic injustices.²¹ This synergy between abolitionism and radical reform holds the potential to not only address immediate needs but to also build the frameworks for long-term liberation and equity within the Black community. Examining Butts and Akbar's five criteria for radical reform is essential to understanding the transformative potential of abolitionist community economic development (ACED). These criteria provide a clear framework for

18. *Id.*

19. Drawing from Allegra McLeod's concept of a "Prison Abolitionist Ethic," which intends to "invoke and build upon a moral orientation elaborated in an existing body of abolitionist writings and nascent social movement efforts, which are committed to ending the practice of confining people in cages and eliminating the control of human beings through imminently threatened police use of violent force." Allegra M. McLeod, *Prison Abolition and Grounded Justice*, 62 UCLA L. REV. 1156, 1162 (2015).

20. Jon Schwarz, *Black Lives Matter Wants to End Police Brutality. History Suggests It Will Go Much Further.*, INTERCEPT (June 27, 2020), <https://theintercept.com/2020/06/27/black-lives-matter-police-brutality-history/> [perma.cc/RAW5-ZYR6]; *About Us*, M4BL, <https://m4bl.org/about-us> [perma.cc/23ZD-VW68] (last visited Jan. 16, 2025).

21. *Id.*

identifying initiatives that go beyond temporary fixes, challenging the current systems in place while envisioning and building equitable alternatives. By applying this framework, we can assess whether there are community-based organizations in the United States that embody abolitionist principles. Projects that dismantle harmful systems, create alternative structures, redistribute power, address historical harms, and improve material conditions qualify as ACED, demonstrating their capacity to achieve meaningful and lasting change in marginalized communities.

The first criteria notes that if a project is to set out to promote radical change in an abolitionist framework, it must without a doubt attempt to dismantle harmful systems which contribute to the oppression, exploitation, and marginalization of oppressed communities, as these systems are often the root causes of social and economic inequities that persist across generations.²² A radical reform must aim to shrink the system that perpetuates subordination and exploitation. Specifically, in the context of abolitionist organizing, this involves shrinking the footprint of oppressive systems such as the prison industrial complex and exploitative economic structures rooted in racialized capitalism that prolong the degradation of those near the bottom of the socioeconomic ladder. The goal is not to improve the way these systems work for a marginalized group but to actively reduce reliance on them to the point that their purpose becomes obsolete, as such dependence perpetuates a constant state of subjugation to external control.

Next, projects that push for radical reforms should reflect the possibilities of different modes of political, economic, and social organization.²³ This involves discrediting mainstream understandings of social governance through education and experimenting with new systems and logics for addressing social problems.²⁴ For example, invest-divest campaigns advocate for shifting resources from police and prisons to education, healthcare, and other social services.²⁵ These campaigns aim to build new infrastructure and skills for thinking about accountability and social provision, creating new possibilities and breaking away from old, ineffective norms.²⁶ Radical reforms challenge deeply rooted notions of power, safety, and justice by redefining how communities address their needs and resolve conflict by replacing punitive and exploitative systems with frameworks centered on collective care and community-driven governance.²⁷ By focusing on redirecting resources toward solutions that tackle the underlying causes of harm such as poverty, educational inequities, and inadequate healthcare, these efforts aim to break cycles of punishment and deprivation.²⁸ In doing so, they encourage the development of equitable, self-sustaining models of governance, empowering communities to envision and create a future free from the constraints of oppressive systems.

22. Stahly-Butts & Akbar, *supra* note 16.

23. *Id.*

24. *Invest-Divest*, M4BL, <https://m4bl.org/policy-platforms/invest-divest> [perma.cc/SNU3-4TWK] (last visited Jan. 16, 2025).

25. NASHVILLE PEOPLE'S BUDGET COAL., <https://www.workersdignity.org/npbc> [perma.cc/9C3M-CGXQ] (last visited Jan. 16, 2025).

26. Stahly-Butts & Akbar, *supra* note 16, at 1557.

27. *Id.*

28. DIGNITY IN SCHOOLS, COUNSELORS NOT COPS: ENDING THE REGULAR PRESENCE OF LAW ENFORCEMENT IN SCHOOLS 1 (2016), http://dignityinschools.org/wpcontent/uploads/2017/10/DSC_Counselors_Not_CopsRecommendations-1.pdf.

Radical reforms should next focus on building and shifting power into the hands of those directly impacted by systemic harm.²⁹ This involves creating new centers of democratic power and ensuring that directly impacted people are the ones diagnosing problems, proposing solutions, and engaging in self-governance. Participatory budgeting campaigns are an example of this, among other community-based methods that democratize local decision-making processes.³⁰ From an economic standpoint, it is known that conventional capitalist development relies on perpetual growth and a continuously expanding consumer base. ACED approaches enterprise development differently. Rather than setting sights on endless market expansion, ACED involves creating sustainable, community-run businesses that hinge their success on local empowerment and cyclical exchange rather than solely profit maximization.

Radical reform projects also make it a goal to address and repair past injustices.³¹ They seriously consider the histories of enslavement, settlement, and colonization and their relationships to contemporary racialized, gendered, and class-based violence and inequality. This involves acknowledging and aiming to repair past harms through education, public memorializing, and creating paths for reparations.³² Movements centered around abolitionist principles are deeply embedded in these efforts, and Black communities are uplifted through actions that intentionally address the root causes of their marginalization and providing tangible avenues for healing and empowerment.

Finally, radical reforms aim to improve the material conditions of directly impacted people, ensuring that reforms do not harm anyone or worsen the conditions of those already oppressed or vulnerable.³³ This involves providing tangible benefits such as financial compensation, job and educational opportunities, and access to healthcare and counseling. The focus is on ensuring that reforms benefit the most marginalized communities without creating divisions or entrenching hierarchies of deserving versus undeserving individuals.³⁴ After understanding these five criteria, we can identify and evaluate abolitionist organizations that push for radical reform in the United States. The framework provides a roadmap for distinguishing transformative initiatives from cosmetic or small procedural efforts. Projects aiming to dismantle oppressive systems, reimagine political and economic structures, redistribute power, address historical harm, and improve material conditions are not only directly confronting systemic inequities but also building pathways to collective liberation. Examining these principles ensures that the work of ACED is not just theoretical but grounded in actionable

29. Stahly-Butts & Akbar, *supra* note 16.

30. HOLLIE RUSSON GILMAN, ENGAGING CITIZENS: PARTICIPATING BUDGETING AND THE INCLUSIVE GOVERNANCE MOVEMENT WITHIN THE UNITED STATES 5 (2016), <https://ash.harvard.edu/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/participatory-budgeting-paper.pdf> [perma.cc/X9UH-A6B3].

31. Stahly-Butts & Akbar, *supra* note 16.

32. ANDREA RITCHIE, DEIRDRE SMITH, JANETTA JOHNSON, JUMOKE IFETAYO, MARBRE STAHLY-BUTTS, MARIAME KABA, MONTAGUE SIMMONS, NKECHI TAIFA, RACHEL HERZING, RICHARD WALLACE & TALIBA OBUYA, REPARATIONS NOW TOOLKIT 51 (2019), <https://m4bl.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Reparations-Now-Toolkit-FINAL.pdf> [perma.cc/4XZT-U93W] [hereinafter REPARATIONS NOW TOOLKIT].

33. Stahly-Butts & Akbar, *supra* note 16.

34. See generally Harry Hutchison, *Toward a Critical Race Reformist Conception of Minimum Wage Regimes: Exploding the Power of Myth, Fantasy, and Hierarchy*, 34 HARV. J. ON LEGIS. 93 (1997).

strategies with the power to uplift Black communities and reshape the social and economic landscape.

II. ABOLITIONIST COMMUNITY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT: A TRANSFORMATIVE ALTERNATIVE TO TRADITIONAL CED IN THE BLACK COMMUNITY

Traditional CED strategies can be attributed to revitalizing low-income communities, temporarily alleviating struggles, and developing pathways to employment for community members.³⁵ CED initiatives are often celebrated for improving the material conditions of the affected communities through work training programs, modest real estate development, and small business loans, among other methods.³⁶ However, these strategies leave us with persisting questions regarding whether these approaches go beyond surface-level gains and accurately address the underlying causes of social and economic injustice within the Black community.³⁷ If our strategies do not confront the underlying structural conditions such as racial wealth gaps, exclusionary systems, historical dispossession of land, and others that have forever denied a basic level of autonomy for the Black community, traditional CED risks placing a mere superficial coating over long-established inequality. ACED offers a different approach in theory, drawing on abolitionist principles and lessons from decades of grassroots organizing.³⁸ ACED seeks not only to generate economic activity but also to redistribute power, challenge exploitative market relationships, and build sustainable, community-owned institutions. Rather than accepting the existing legal and market frameworks as is, ACED practitioners can imagine new possibilities grounded in collective ownership, democratic decision-making, and reparative justice. By focusing on community control of resources, addressing historical racial injustice, and pursuing long-term cohesiveness, ACED aligns with broader movements for radical social transformation and liberation and seeks to create lasting change.

A. ACED Imagines Structural Transformation Rather Than Surface-Level Benefits

Traditional CED projects may sometimes overemphasize metrics such as short-term job creation, small business lending, and local housing development without considering opportunities to alter the structural arrangements that further plague the communities they are working within.³⁹ These metrics often fail to catch whether there are actual shifts in local power structures. In contrast, ACED calls for new measures of success that center on community ownership, collective governance, and equitable distribution of resources. While funding select local businesses or training residents in entry-level service positions may boost job growth, these measures often fail to challenge the fundamental economic disparities.

35. Michael Haber, *CED after #OWS: From Community Economic Development to Anti-Authoritarian Community Counter-Institutions*, 43 FORDHAM URB. L.J. 295, 303 (2016).

36. *Id.*

37. Comment, *The New Public Interest Lawyers*, 79 YALE L.J. 1069, 1077 (1970).

38. Scott L. Cummings, *Mobilization Lawyering: Community Economic Development in the Figueroa Corridor*, in CAUSE LAWYERS AND SOCIAL MOVEMENTS 302, 313 (Austin Sarat & Stuart Scheingold eds., 2006); Sheila R. Foster & Brian Glick, *Integrative Lawyering: Navigating the Political Economy of Urban Redevelopment*, 95 CALIF. L. REV. 1999, 2048–53 (2007).

39. Haber, *supra* note 35, at 316.

ACED would gauge success by whether residents from within the community hold genuine decision-making authority, whether wealth remains firmly established within the community, and whether the community's overall dependence on outside capital has lessened. The focus is on seeking structural transformation that ensures lasting economic autonomy. Black communities continue to face entrenched barriers such as discriminatory lending, lack of generational wealth, and persistent underinvestment that confine them to the bottom of the social hierarchy. Throughout the years, we have seen well-intentioned efforts to grow Black financial institutions fail when these initiatives operate within a broader racialized market that siphons off wealth and opportunity.⁴⁰ ACED represents a radical departure from conventional CED approaches to economic revitalization and self-sustainment. ACED emphasizes community control of resources, cooperative ownership structures, and a collective reimagining of local economies. This approach aims to dismantle a reliance on the hierarchical structures which historically have concentrated wealth in the hands of the elite, imposed top-down decision-making, and preserved the negative cycle of racial and economic injustices within Black communities. The emphasis of ACED is not to merely improve material conditions but also to reshape the very relationships and power dynamics that define how wealth is created and distributed within society. In its application to the Black community, which since this country's formation has been excluded from economic opportunity, ACED seeks to break cycles of exploitation, stabilize Black neighborhoods, and forge new paths toward genuine economic sovereignty. In doing so, ACED transcends many of the traditional, market-oriented CED models that often overlook systemic inequities and produce only short-lived gains.⁴¹ Instead, ACED takes a radically different path by granting decision-making authority in local enterprises and emphasizing community ownership.⁴² This focus on an economic democracy, through concepts like worker-owned cooperatives, participatory decision-making processes, community focused credit unions, and collectively managed land trusts, goes beyond superficial, reactionary improvements. Instead of integrating marginalized populations into inequitable systems, ACED strives to dismantle the underlying structures of exploitation. By building businesses that fall within the direct control of members of the community members, we can ensure that profits are retained and reinvested locally, fostering tangible growth in all aspects of the community.⁴³ This method may disrupt the cycles of extraction and dependency,⁴⁴ enabling communities to address inequality

40. MEHRSA BARADARAN, *THE COLOR OF MONEY: BLACK BANKS AND THE RACIAL WEALTH GAP* 144 (2017).

41. Haber, *supra* note 35, at 346–47.

42. Sarah Jaffe, *The Power of Occupy Wall Street Is Not Just What They're Doing, but How They're Doing It*, ALTERNET (Nov. 29, 2011), http://www.alternet.org/story/153182/the-power-of-Occupy-wall-street-is-not-just-what-they%27re-doing_-but-how-they%27re-doing-it_.

43. Seka Lussier, *Redefining Sustainability Through Community Ownership*, PERS. CMTY. SOLS. (July 30, 2024), <https://pcs-scp.ca/redefining-sustainability-through-community-ownership/> [perma.cc/MB36-5683] (describing community ownership as a model for sustainable development).

44. Foster & Glick, *supra* note 38, at 2017 (arguing that community benefits agreements can help “low-income and working-class people to develop their own vision for their communities, moving beyond mainstream CED’s dependence on outside capital, which determines what types of facilities can be built and what services provided in low income communities”).

from within and under their own initiatives, rather than passively waiting and relying upon external solutions.

Initiatives which incorporate worker-owned cooperatives⁴⁵ acknowledge the fact that the Black community has historically faced disproportionately high unemployment rates, low-wage jobs, and limited opportunities for advancement, and thus has sought to create avenues to stable, justly compensated work.⁴⁶ By redistributing decision-making authority and profits from a centralized owner or shareholders to the workers themselves who reside within the community, cooperatives challenge the traditional U.S. employer-employee hierarchy that often undervalues Black labor. Worker owned cooperatives are unique because members have a voice in setting policies, pay scales, and strategic priorities.⁴⁷ This fosters equitable wealth distribution, as profits are not extracted by absent and disconnected owners but rather are reinvested in the community workforce and the local economy. Over time, worker-owned cooperatives can help build generational wealth and create a growing sense of pride and collective responsibility.⁴⁸ This approach would improve overall job significance and quality, offering accommodating working conditions, better benefits, and increased opportunities for skill-building and leadership development, all of which enhance economic security and dignity within the community.⁴⁹ As we will examine in a later case study, worker-owned cooperatives are proven strategies that create pathways to stable, fairly compensated work.

Many of the traditional CED efforts happen behind closed doors and receive input from external funders, city officials, or corporate boards that lack meaningful community insight.⁵⁰ Participatory decision-making reverses this dynamic by placing community members at the forefront of economic and policy decisions that affect their own neighborhoods.⁵¹ Mechanisms like people's assemblies, participatory budgeting, and cooperative boards ensure that community members can collectively deliberate, prioritize resources, and set long-term goals.⁵² This democratization of power in and of itself is extremely important for Black communities, which have long been overlooked and denied a say in the conditions that shape their livelihood and opportunity for societal advancement. When voices from within the community guide its development, resources can be rightfully directed toward specific needs such as quality affordable housing, education, health

45. *What Is a Worker Cooperative?*, DEMOCRACY WORK INST., <https://institute.coop/what-worker-cooperative> [perma.cc/2MHS-CH9P] (last visited Jan. 17, 2025).

46. *Worker Co-ops*, CAL. CTR. COOP. DEV., <https://cccd.coop/co-op-info/co-op-types/worker-co-ops> [perma.cc/2V9T-9GRC] (last visited Dec. 27, 2025).

47. *Id.*

48. *What is a Worker Cooperative*, *supra* note 45.

49. *Id.*

50. *See generally* Interview by Dan Young & Ian Mayes with Thom Pepper, Operational Dir., Common Ground Relief Org., in Fort Bragg, CA (Nov. 30, 2007), <https://knyo.libsyn.com/webpage/just-and-sustainable-new-orleans-common-ground-relief> [perma.cc/94KT-HN73].

51. *See generally* Ronald M. Epstein, Brian S. Alper & Timothy E. Quill, *Communicating Evidence for Participatory Decision Making*, 291 JAMA 2359, 2359–2366 (2004).

52. Carmen Huertas-Noble, *Promoting Worker-Owned Cooperatives as a CED Empowerment Strategy: A Case Study of Colors and Lawyering in Support of Participatory Decision-Making and Meaningful Social Change*, 17 CLINICAL L. REV. 255, 266 (2010) (explaining that community empowerment is fostered through collective, participatory processes that seek to redistribute wealth and power).

services, and culturally relevant businesses.⁵³ While simultaneously validating local knowledge and expertise, participatory decision-making efforts also contribute to political agency.⁵⁴ As community members gain familiarity with governance structures and participate in a shared discourse around community objectives, political power can be fostered along with a shield against predatory external interests.⁵⁵

Access to fair, affordable financial services has been a persistent barrier for many Black communities, who have historically been excluded from mainstream banking or targeted by predatory lenders. There are currently only twenty-one Black-owned banks in the United States today.⁵⁶ While there are relatively few Black-owned banks, Black-owned credit unions have a slightly stronger presence, with over two hundred currently operating across the country.⁵⁷ Community-focused credit unions offer tailored financial products like savings accounts, small business loans, and mortgages to the specific needs of local residents.⁵⁸ Because they are member-owned and operate on a not-for-profit basis, credit unions concentrate on serving the community's financial well-being rather than extracting maximum profits. This idea aligns with ACED principles that foster self-sustaining practices and cease the need to look to larger, external institutions for aid. For Black entrepreneurs who often struggle to secure capital from traditional banks, community credit unions open opportunities to start or expand small businesses. This can revitalize local commercial corridors, ensure the dollar bounces throughout the community many times over, and reduce dependence on high-interest bank loans. Furthermore, credit unions are known to frequently provide financial literacy programs, a form of education that is often missing from the Black community.⁵⁹ Financial literacy is key to ensuring community members correctly build credit, navigate debt responsibly, and accumulate savings. Over time, these financial institutions can play a vital role in ensuring economic stability for many Black families, developing wealth that can be passed down to future generations.⁶⁰

ACED frames economic development as a source of collective empowerment rather than a tool to attract outside entities and achieve superficial levels of growth for the community. Much of traditional CED measures success by increased property values and local activity, overseen though the actions of external profit seekers and often leading to displacement, gentrification, and sustained inequities.⁶¹ The implementation of community land trusts reflects ACED principles by placing

53. *Id.*

54. Veryl Pow, *Grassroots Movement Lawyering: Insights from the George Floyd Rebellion*, 69 UCLA L. REV. 80, 160 (2022).

55. *Id.* at 153.

56. LaToya Irby, *Black-Owned Banks in America: A State-by-State List*, EXPERIAN (Nov. 30, 2024), <https://www.experian.com/blogs/ask-experian/black-owned-banks-in-america/> [perma.cc/P8MW-BABP].

57. *Id.*

58. BARADARAN, *supra* note 40, at 148–49.

59. *The Role of Credit Unions in Empowering Financial Wellness and Education*, ENRICH (Feb. 1, 2024), <https://www.enrich.org/blog/the-role-of-credit-unions-in-empowering-financial-wellness-and-education/> [perma.cc/68JC-N9G6].

60. *Black History Month: How Credit Unions Played a Role in Helping Black Americans*, CENTERPARC, <https://www.centerparc.org/black-history-month-how-credit-unions-played-a-role-in-helping-black-americans/> (last visited Jan. 17, 2025).

61. Haber, *supra* note 35, at 360.

land ownership and land use autonomy within the hands of the community, rather than in the hands of developers or other external bodies who are disconnected from the community. Community land trusts acquire land and hold it for the benefit of the community rather than for speculative market gains.⁶² By separating the value of the land from the structures built on it, homes remain affordable across generations, ensuring that improvements to the neighborhood do not inadvertently push out long-term residents.⁶³ For Black communities, which have been disproportionately affected by gentrification and displacement, community land trusts ensure long-term access to stable housing, enabling families to stay grounded in their communities and preserve their social connections and cultural traditions. Moreover, when land governance is placed in the hands of community members through membership-based boards and transparent decision-making structures, community land trusts ensure that development reflects the local priorities of the community.⁶⁴ This can lead to the creation of community gardens, cultural centers, and other resources that improve residents' quality of life.⁶⁵ In the long run, this land also serves as an economic asset that communities can leverage for their collective gain, whether that means building more housing, building more local businesses, developing healthcare or educational institutions, or investing in other types of infrastructure that supports collective well-being.

III. CASE STUDIES: EXAMINING BLACK-LED ACED IN THE UNITED STATES AND AN ANALYSIS OF EACH ORGANIZATION THROUGH A RADICAL REFORM LENS

This analysis examines two examples of Black-led community-based efforts, Cooperation Jackson in Jackson, Mississippi, and The Guild in Atlanta, Georgia, and considers how these organizations embody the principles of radical reform and align with ACED concepts. Both initiatives emphasize community ownership, cooperative economies, and the creation of self-sustaining, locally governed institutions. By doing so, their endeavors do not simply seek to mitigate harm felt by Black communities but to fundamentally reshape the underlying systems and power dynamics that have denied Black communities economic sovereignty for generations.

A. Cooperation Jackson: An Organization Dedicated to Building Community-Owned Cooperatives and Fostering Economic Sovereignty in Black Communities

Cooperation Jackson is a grassroots network of worker-owned cooperatives, mutual aid societies, and resource-sharing organizations based in Jackson, Mississippi.⁶⁶ Rooted in the legacy of the Black radical tradition—drawing from the Civil Rights Movement, the struggle for Black self-determination, and the principles

62. *Community Land Trusts*, GROUNDED SOLS. NETWORK, <https://groundedsolutions.org/strengthening-neighborhoods/community-land-trusts> [perma.cc/CA3R-69W3] (last visited Jan. 18, 2025).

63. *Id.*

64. Rosalind Greenstein & Yesim Sungu-Eryilmaz, *Community Land Trusts: Leasing Land for Affordable Housing*, LINCOLN INST. LAND POL'Y (Apr. 1, 2005), <https://www.lincolninst.edu/publications/articles/community-land-trusts/> [perma.cc/C4VX-DKER].

65. *Startup Community Land Trust Hub*, ASS'N BAY AREA GOV'TS (Aug. 23, 2021), <https://abag.ca.gov/technical-assistance/startup-community-land-trust-hub> [perma.cc/WH56-E49X].

66. *Definition & Principles*, COOP. JACKSON, <https://cooperationjackson.org/principles> [perma.cc/63Q9-VS3H] (last visited Jan. 18, 2025).

of racial and economic justice—Cooperation Jackson seeks to build a “solidarity economy,” an alternative economic framework that prioritizes community cultivation over profit.⁶⁷ A solidarity economy seeks to replace exploitative capitalist systems with ethical, democratic, and inclusive economic structures.⁶⁸ It encompasses practices like worker-owned cooperatives, community land trusts, barter networks, participatory governance, and ethical consumption.⁶⁹ The goal is to create an economy that centers the needs and voices of marginalized communities, fostering resilience and equity while dismantling systemic oppression.⁷⁰ The founders of Cooperation Jackson envisioned creating a decentralized infrastructure of cooperatives: examples include worker-owned enterprises that produce goods and services for the local community, as well as community land trusts, time banks, and other forms of shared resource management.⁷¹ Through its “Jackson-Kush Plan,” Cooperation Jackson aims to combat the legacy of racism and exploitation in Mississippi by establishing a community-owned economic base, fostering grassroots democracy, and ultimately achieving Black self-determination.⁷²

1. *The Solidarity Economy Model*

Cooperation Jackson employs a solidarity economy model which transforms economic systems by centering people and the planet rather than profit and growth.⁷³ Unlike traditional capitalist systems, it operates through interconnected practices that prioritize cooperation, democracy, and social justice.⁷⁴ By creating cooperatives, community land trusts, and social enterprises, the solidarity economy builds alternative economic structures that address immediate material needs while working toward systemic transformation.⁷⁵ In analyzing whether Cooperation Jackson employs efforts which shrink harmful systems, it is evident that the organization staunchly works to reduce reliance on and engagement with traditional capitalist structures and exploitative labor markets.⁷⁶ Rather than depending on multinational corporations or profit-driven development schemes, Cooperation

67. *Building a Solidarity Economy in the South and Beyond*, COOP. JACKSON (Sept. 5, 2024), <https://cooperationjackson.org/blog/2024/9/5/building-a-solidarity-economy-in-the-south-and-beyond> [perma.cc/8NR7-8JY3].

68. *What Do We Mean by Solidarity Economy?*, SOLIDARITY ECON. PRINCIPLES, <https://solidarityeconomyprinciples.org/what-do-we-mean-by-solidarity-economy/> [perma.cc/7KHJ-C3X2] (last visited Jan. 18, 2025).

69. *Id.*

70. *Building a Solidarity Economy*, *supra* note 67.

71. *Id.*

72. *Our Story*, COOP. JACKSON, <https://cooperationjackson.org/story> [perma.cc/9LFS-95SD] (last visited Jan. 18, 2025).

73. Emily Kawano, *A Shareable Explainer: What Is the Solidarity Economy?*, SHAREABLE (May 2, 2024), <https://www.shareable.net/a-shareable-explainer-what-is-the-solidarity-economy/> [perma.cc/43PN-9DFK].

74. *What Do We Mean by Solidarity Economy*, *supra* note 68.

75. ILCHEONG YI, FULVIA FARINELLI & RAYMOND LANDVELD, *NEW ECONOMICS FOR SUSTAINABILITY DEVELOPMENT: SOCIAL AND SOLIDARITY ECONOMY* (Mar. 29, 2023), https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/social_and_solidarity_economy_29_march_2023.pdf [perma.cc/D348-QALN].

76. Marbre Stahly-Butts & Amna A. Akbar, *Reforms for Radicals? An Abolitionist Framework*, 68 UCLA L. Rev. 1544, 1554 (2022) (stating, in the context of prison abolition, that abolitionist aims focus on shrinking the footprint of destructive systems in service of their ultimate elimination).

Jackson advances a cooperative economy where workers themselves own and manage enterprises.⁷⁷ This approach aims to dismantle or at least diminish the power of systems that rely on cheap Black labor, extract wealth from the community, and funnel profits outside the region. By rooting economic activity in local labor, local decision-making, and equitable distribution of benefits, Cooperation Jackson substantially shrinks the influence of harmful market mechanisms that perpetuate inequality. For example, Cooperation Jackson's Sustainable Communities Initiative exemplifies ACED principles by creating interconnected systems that prioritize social, cultural, ecological, and economic sustainability.⁷⁸ The initiative focuses on stabilizing rents, providing affordable green housing, creating living-wage jobs, and fostering community self-governance and self-determination.⁷⁹ Central to this effort is the Fannie Lou Hamer Community Land Trust, which removes land from the speculative market and ensures it is used for permanent, community-controlled housing, playgrounds, and businesses.⁸⁰ This model empowers the Black community in Jackson by providing affordable housing and collective decision-making regarding land use.

2. Sustainable Development Projects

The Freedom Farms Cooperative, along with other worker-owned enterprises under Cooperation Jackson, allow Black residents to collectively own and operate businesses, breaking the cycles of exploitation associated with low-wage, insecure jobs.⁸¹ By providing stable employment and democratic control over the workplace, these cooperatives address the historical exclusion of Black workers from equitable economic opportunities and challenge the systemic exploitation inherent in racialized capitalism. Another concrete example is Cooperation Jackson's establishment of various worker-owned cooperatives under the broader umbrella of the Jackson-Kush Plan.⁸² For instance, it helped form an eco-friendly printing and apparel cooperative—where members collectively own equipment, vote on operational decisions, share profits equitably, and reinvest earnings into the community.⁸³ This cooperative model departs from a traditional top-down business structure, allowing workers to collaboratively determine prices, marketing approaches, and sustainable production methods. By doing so, Cooperation Jackson demonstrates an alternative economy that challenges conventional hierarchies, places worker welfare at the center of decision-making, and reduces dependence on external, profit-driven investors.

In addition, Cooperation Jackson operates the “Fab Lab,” a fabrication laboratory that serves as a community space equipped with digital fabrication tools like 3D printers and CNC machines.⁸⁴ The lab serves as a training center that

77. *Principles*, COOP. JACKSON, <https://cooperationjackson.org/principles> [perma.cc/W87J-U G8J] (last visited Jan. 19, 2025).

78. *Sustainable Communities Initiative*, COOP. JACKSON, <https://cooperationjackson.org/sustainable-communities-initiative> [perma.cc/PV3G-UYDE] (last visited Jan. 19, 2025).

79. *Id.*

80. *Id.*

81. *Id.*

82. *Id.*

83. *Id.*

84. *The Community Production Initiative*, COOP. JACKSON, <https://cooperationjackson.org/the-community-production-initiative> [perma.cc/K4C6-LTSJ] (last visited Dec. 27, 2025).

encourages entrepreneurship in the tech field among youth and local inventors, providing paths for entry into high-skill sectors.⁸⁵ By integrating low-cost manufacturing with collective decision-making, the Fab Lab has the potential to aid Jackson residents in designing creative solutions for various community needs. From prototyping eco-friendly products to creating custom parts for local infrastructure, there are endless applications.

3. *Democratic Community Governance Models*

In addition to establishing cooperatives, Cooperation Jackson has organized community assemblies where local residents, including those historically marginalized from economic decision-making, directly consider priorities such as which types of businesses to incubate or which community infrastructure projects to pursue next.⁸⁶ By convening these assemblies and ensuring every participant has a voice, Cooperation Jackson redistributes economic and political authority, shifting it from distant corporations or municipal boards to the people who live, work, and build families in Jackson's Black neighborhoods. In addition, the Fannie Lou Hamer Community Land Trust is a mode of action through which land is reclaimed for community use, solidifying access to affordable housing and collective enterprises for Black residents.⁸⁷ By preventing displacement caused by gentrification and speculative real estate practices, the land trust helps undo the historical harm of land dispossession and racialized housing policies. It provides a means for the community to retain ownership of its assets and preserve wealth across generations.

4. *Acknowledging and Repairing Historical Harms*

Mississippi's history is marked by slavery, sharecropping, segregation, and ongoing discrimination, all of which have inflicted intergenerational harm on Black communities. Cooperation Jackson's model addresses these historical injustices by helping residents reclaim economic agency and break cycles of exploitation.⁸⁸ Community land trusts, for example, rectify decades of discriminatory housing policies and predatory lending that barred Black families from building wealth through homeownership.⁸⁹ Worker cooperatives reduce dependence on exploitative employers who have historically excluded or underpaid Black laborers.⁹⁰ By collectively owning productive assets and setting equitable terms of exchange, the community actively heals from past harm while forging avenues for durable prosperity.

5. *Enhancing Material Conditions for the Community*

Cooperation Jackson's model of cooperative economics intentionally redirects wealth into Black communities, building collective wealth that benefits residents instead of external investors. This reparative approach counters the long-standing

85. *Id.*

86. *Id.*

87. *Id.*

88. *Sustainable Communities Initiative*, *supra* note 78.

89. *Id.*

90. *The Preamble*, M4BL, <https://m4bl.org/policy-platforms/the-preamble/> [perma.cc/8WAU-ZLD7] (last visited Jan. 19, 2025).

economic disinvestment and predatory practices that have drained wealth from Black neighborhoods.⁹¹ The recent water crisis in Jackson illustrates how the Mississippi state government, rather than allocating funds and relief to residents, attempted to seize control of the water system.⁹² This highlights the urgency of community-led initiatives. While rooting economic power locally and resisting state-driven retrenchment through their various initiatives, Cooperation Jackson seeks to solidify civic autonomy and ensure that this historically marginalized community retains the resources and authority needed to secure its future.

Further, the organization's urban farming initiatives empower the Black community by reclaiming control over food production. These projects repair harm caused by discriminatory practices in agriculture, such as the denial of land ownership and access to healthy food in Black communities. Urban farming initiatives on reclaimed lots provide fresh produce to residents, while also creating job training opportunities and nurturing the health of the community.⁹³ By fostering food sovereignty, these programs directly combat food deserts and the nutritional inequities that disproportionately affect marginalized populations. The Sustainable Communities Initiative also incorporates efforts to create eco-friendly infrastructure within an "Eco-Village" model that integrates sustainable energy and waste management systems.⁹⁴ Complementing these efforts, the organization plans to establish a Construction Cooperative to develop housing and rebuild abandoned properties, as well as a Waste Management and Recycling Cooperative to achieve zero-waste goals and support community enterprises like Freedom Farms and Green Team Landscaping.⁹⁵ Together, these initiatives foster a solidarity economy rooted in cooperative enterprises, addressing systemic inequities while empowering residents to build a resilient, self-sustaining community.

B. The Guild: An Organization Dedicated to Regenerative Neighborhood Development and Community Wealth-Building in Black Communities

The Guild is an Atlanta-based organization dedicated to "regenerative neighborhood development," which centers on empowering Black communities to shape their own economic and social landscapes.⁹⁶ Like Cooperation Jackson, The Guild operates on the belief that community wealth-building must come from within. The organization's approach prioritizes community-controlled development, cooperative ownership, and solidarity economies, aligning closely with ACED principles and meeting several of the criteria for radical reform. By focusing on non-extractive capital and supporting Black-owned enterprises, The Guild constructs wealth-building models that shift power and resources into the hands of those historically marginalized by traditional market structures.⁹⁷ It focuses on creating cooperative housing models, developing equitable real estate strategies,

91. *Sustainable Communities Initiative*, *supra* note 78

92. *Jackson Water Crisis*, NAACP, <https://naacp.org/campaigns/jackson-water-crisis> [perma.cc/T5BZ-VE7Q] (last visited Jan. 20, 2025).

93. *Id.*

94. *Id.*

95. *Id.*

96. *About*, THE GUILD, <https://www.theguild.community/about/> [perma.cc/6M2Y-Y3HT] (last visited Jan. 20, 2025).

97. *Id.*

and providing comprehensive financial education and support. By leveraging community resources, building alliances with local institutions, and investing in people rather than merely attracting external capital, The Guild aims to produce sustainable, community-rooted solutions that counter Atlanta's historical patterns of gentrification and displacement.⁹⁸

1. Community-Led Development and Cooperative Ownership Models

Atlanta's housing market, like many urban centers, is plagued by speculation, rising rents, and deepening inequality. Similar to Cooperation Jackson, The Guild counters these traditional systems by establishing community land trusts and housing initiatives that remove land from the speculative market.⁹⁹ By doing so, it circumvents profit-driven real estate practices that have historically preyed on Black neighborhoods. Instead of allowing developers or landlords to dictate housing costs, The Guild ensures that stable, affordable homes remain in community hands, effectively shrinking the reach of exploitative real estate systems.¹⁰⁰

2. Pioneering Various Collaborative Ventures

The Guild embraces cooperative and community-owned structures as an antidote to the top-down, investor-led models common in traditional CED. Through its cooperative housing projects and collaborative economic ventures, it reorients control away from profiteers and toward residents. Additionally, The Guild's holistic approach integrates economic development with environmental sustainability and cultural preservation. This reimagining of "development" counters mainstream illustrations of progress and success, instead offering a regenerative framework that nurtures community bonds and ecological health.¹⁰¹

3. Shifting Power to Community-Led Governance and Local Residents

Much of the power within Atlanta's housing market often rests with investors, developers, and city planners who rarely prioritize the well-being of Black residents. By creating community-led land trusts and placing governance structures in the hands of local stakeholders, The Guild redistributes decision-making authority. Residents can determine rental rates and neighborhood development projects, select tenants, guide reinvestments, and block exploitative arrangements.¹⁰² In effect, The Guild helps dismantle hierarchies that have perpetuated racial and economic injustices, restoring agency to those who have been systematically disempowered.

4. Combating Displacement and Economic Disenfranchisement

Historically, Black communities in Atlanta have suffered from disinvestment, redlining, and displacement as wealthier newcomers move into once-disadvantaged

98. 379 Elm Street, THE GUILD, <https://www.theguild.community/peoples-community-land-trust/379-elm-street/> [perma.cc/5GQF-5G22] (last visited Jan. 20, 2025).

99. *About*, *supra* note 96.

100. *Id.*

101. CHRIS DIXON, ANOTHER POLITICS: TALKING ACROSS TODAY'S TRANSFORMATIVE MOVEMENTS 59 (2014).

102. *About*, *supra* note 96.

areas. The city has experienced rapid population growth and urban redevelopment in recent decades, leading to escalating housing prices and the displacement of long-time residents.¹⁰³ Predominantly Black neighborhoods that once provided affordable housing and cultural continuity have been particularly affected, as rising property values push lower-income families out.¹⁰⁴ Developers and investors often target these areas, seeking profits by transforming historic communities into upscale districts catering to more affluent newcomers.¹⁰⁵ The resulting loss of generational homes, cultural landmarks, and local businesses has eroded the social fabric and identity of many neighborhoods.¹⁰⁶ Despite some policy responses and community organizing, gentrification remains a persistent and controversial challenge in shaping Atlanta's future. The Guild addresses these legacies by ensuring that gains in neighborhood quality benefit existing residents rather than triggering their removal. By locking in affordability, The Guild's initiatives serve as reparative measures. They acknowledge the historical harm inflicted by racist housing policies and actively reverse these trends through stable homeownership opportunities, long-term affordability covenants, and housing education programs that help families build generational wealth.¹⁰⁷

5. *Creating Affordable Housing, Supporting Black-Owned Businesses, and Developing Sustainable Economic Infrastructure*

The Guild's community-centered projects create affordable housing, provide stable living conditions, and establish economic infrastructures that communities can rely on.¹⁰⁸ For example, by leveraging credit unions or local investment vehicles, The Guild helps channel capital directly to Black entrepreneurs, enabling them to launch businesses that serve neighborhood needs rather than chasing profits for absentee owners. Over time, these material improvements can reduce the cost of living, increase household savings, boost educational outcomes, and enhance residents' sense of security.

C. *Cooperation Jackson and The Guild Demonstrate How ACED Can Transform Communities and Lead to Equitable, Sustainable Futures*

Both Cooperation Jackson and the Guild exemplify ACED principles and meet the criteria for reform illustrated by Stahly-Butts and Akbar.¹⁰⁹ They shrink harmful systems by challenging exploitative capitalism—Cooperation Jackson does this through worker-owned cooperatives, and The Guild through community-owned housing. Each organization adopts alternative organizations that oppose conventional market logics, relying on solidarity economies, cooperatives, and

103. Kristen Klurfield, *A Snapshot of Housing Supply and Affordability Challenges in Atlanta*, BIPARTISAN POL'Y CTR. (Nov. 30, 2023), <https://bipartisanpolicy.org/blog/a-snapshot-of-housing-supply-and-affordability-challenges-in-atlanta/> [web.archive.org/web/20231223214102/https://bipartisanpolicy.org/blog/a-snapshot-of-housing-supply-and-affordability-challenges-in-atlanta/].

104. *Id.*

105. *Id.*

106. *Id.*

107. THE GUILD, <https://www.theguild.community/> [perma.cc/6ZPU-NF4V] (last visited Jan. 21, 2025).

108. *Id.*

109. Stahly-Butts & Akbar, *supra* note 16.

community land trusts. Moreover, both initiatives meaningfully shift power, ensuring that economic decisions and governance structures lie in the hands of Black communities who have historically been denied such influence.

However, we see that there are differences between the two organizations which highlight the varied applications of ACED principles. Cooperation Jackson's emphasis lies heavily on developing a holistic solidarity economy, focused on the production and consumption of goods and services in a manner that builds community resilience.¹¹⁰ Its worker-owned cooperatives encourage local labor control and shared prosperity. The Guild, while also deeply invested in shifting power, directs much of its energy toward addressing Atlanta's housing crisis and resisting gentrification. Its model leans into property-based interventions, ensuring long-term housing affordability and property stewardship to remedy centuries of housing injustice.

Despite these differences, both organizations adhere to the previously laid-out criteria for radical reform. Both deal with past harms—in Mississippi, grappling with the legacy of an extractive economy built on Black labor, and in Atlanta, responding to the cumulative impacts of redlining, discrimination, and predatory infrastructure development. Both organizations also improve material conditions—Cooperation Jackson does so by creating stable jobs and economic infrastructures that insulate residents from exploitative employment, and The Guild does so by securing affordable housing and helping residents build long-term equity and wealth. Both efforts also involve community education and skill-building, with Cooperation Jackson training worker-owners in cooperative governance, while The Guild empowers residents to understand and navigate financial markets, hosting regular workshops and educational programs to provide awareness and tools that help the community thrive.

In terms of scope, Cooperation Jackson's vision might be considered more comprehensive in its attempt to develop an entire ecosystem of cooperative enterprises and community institutions—energy production, urban agriculture, and manufacturing cooperatives—reflecting a broader plan for political and economic autonomy.¹¹¹ The Guild, though also broad in its approach, has thus far emphasized regenerative neighborhood development, focusing on the built environment and related economic infrastructures.

Nonetheless, both organizations embody the spirit of ACED and lead paths to forge elaborate structures that outlast short-term grants and pilot projects, ensuring that any improvement in economic metrics is accompanied by genuine power shifts that are felt by none other than those within the community.¹¹² While traditional CED has often celebrated the arrival of new investors or marginal improvements in employment figures, ACED projects like Cooperation Jackson and The Guild define success in terms of strengthened community governance, the accumulation of generational wealth, and enhanced collective capacity to resist exploitation. At first glance, these outcomes seem less quantifiable than those which CED has to offer. However, ACED can still produce tangible indicators of

110. *Sustainable Communities Initiative*, *supra* note 78.

111. *Id.*

112. Veryl Pow, *Grassroots Movement Lawyering: Insights from the George Floyd Rebellion*, 69 UCLA L. REV. 80, 158 (2022).

success. For example, communities can track the number of resident-owned ventures and their overall progression. Communities can also track the expansion of implemented land trusts and evaluate the share of local supply chains controlled by neighborhood co-ops. These measures can help lead to improvements in governance while noting the community's progression towards generational wealth. It also may serve to demonstrate how ACED projects can retain capital within the community and reduce vulnerability to exploitative markets. Through demonstrating verifiable improvements on community well-being and civic engagement, ACED is also able to attract a newer type of capital that emphasizes lasting impact, cultural dignity, and long-term resilience over short-term returns.

Both organizations serve as powerful testaments to the feasibility of ACED and radical reform in practice. They do not merely critique existing systems; they provide accomplishable examples of how to reshape them. By dissolving harmful systems, experimenting with new economic models, transferring power to those harmed by injustice, addressing historical wrongs, and improving daily life for community members, these organizations embody the five elements Stahly-Butts and Akbar present as essential for meaningful and radical change.¹¹³ They move beyond token reforms and performative gestures to offer a future in which Black communities exercise the autonomy and control needed to break free from cycles of exploitation they have endured in this country and take charge of their own socioeconomic destinies.

IV. HOW CAN WE SCALE AND EXPAND ACED AS A MODEL FOR RADICAL REFORM?

Traditional CED models often focus on the future, but mostly in the sense that they are aiming to attract outside attention and create opportunities that might not be beneficial for the community as a whole.¹¹⁴ This is without acknowledging the historical forces that produce the current inequalities. By ignoring the legacies of redlining, segregation, and racialized exclusion from capital markets, these projects fail to provide the systemic redress Black communities need. Without addressing past harm and incorporating abolitionist principles, CED projects run the risk of replicating patterns of economic exclusion or leaving centuries-old wounds unhealed.¹¹⁵

ACED understands that current disparities are not by chance. Rather, these inequities are the direct result of public policy choices, white supremacist ideologies, and exploitative economic arrangements. To counter this, ACED integrates reparative justice into its core principles. Abolitionist frameworks emphasize not only dismantling oppressive institutions but also investing in life-affirming alternatives which close equity gaps and improve the quality of life for the affected communities. In this context, that means restoring resources to communities

113. Stahly-Butts & Akbar, *supra* note 16.

114. As deindustrialized cities pursue urban renewal and redevelopment to attract a wealthier tax base, many municipalities have relied on eminent domain to displace Black homeowners. Marisela B. Gomez, *Johns Hopkins University and the History of Developing East Baltimore*, in *BALTIMORE REVISITED: STORIES OF INEQUALITY AND RESISTANCE IN A U.S. CITY* 243, 247-48, 250-51 (P. Nicole King, Kate Drabinski & Joshua Clark Davis eds., 2019).

115. Allegra M. McLeod, *Envisioning Abolition Democracy*, 132 HARV. L. REV. 1613, 1619 (2019).

historically denied their fair share, forging pathways toward economic self-determination, and ensuring that every initiative is grounded in the recognition of and remedy for past harms. ACED insists on long-term thinking and planning. Its strategies revolve around establishing sustainable, community-owned institutions like community cooperatives, worker-owned businesses, community banks, local trade networks—all of which have the potential to weather economic downturns and political shifts. Instead of pursuing short-lived metrics, ACED seeks to cultivate ecosystems that can adapt to changing conditions. Over time, these institutions will build community wealth, social cohesion, and human capital. Movements with an ACED perspective can foster genuine resilience, enabling communities not only to survive future challenges but also to thrive under conditions of their own making. It is worth noting that ACED does not exist in a vacuum. It is intimately connected to wider struggles against mass incarceration, environmental injustice, and the exploitation of labor. Much like the Movement for Black Lives calls for defunding the police and investing in community-based safety and wellness infrastructures, ACED calls for defunding exploitative economic structures and investing in community-based economic institutions.¹¹⁶ Both efforts share visions of a society that rejects carceral logic and neoliberal extraction, instead prioritizing unity and collective prosperity.

A. Offering Potential Policy Recommendations and Institutional Support to Establish ACED Efforts

To translate ACED principles into tangible realities, several policy changes and institutional support are necessary. Law should not merely facilitate existing market relationships but be reimagined to serve community well-being and liberation.¹¹⁷ For example, local and state governments can legally recognize and support cooperatives, adjusting corporate and tax law to make it easier for communities to form and maintain worker-owned businesses. States may adopt provisions similar to Minnesota's Cooperative Associations Act, which grants worker-owners the legal flexibility to structure governance around democratic decision-making.¹¹⁸ Legislation such as this explicitly allows cooperatives to create membership classes, distribute voting power, and establish democratic procedures tailored to the priorities of a given co-op, simplifying day-to-day operations for worker-owners and expanding their authority. Moreover, federal or state tax codes could offer credits or deductions for business owners who convert their existing businesses into worker cooperatives, providing a viable path to communal ownership. This may be enticing for business owners who are nearing retirement or

116. *End the War on Black Communities*, M4BL, <https://m4bl.org/policy-platforms/end-the-war-on-black-communities/> [perma.cc/UEL9-RWM7] (last visited Jan. 20, 2025).

117. Susan L. Brooks, *Reimagining Lawyering: Supporting Well-Being and Liberation*, 52 HOFSTRA L. REV. 1, 8 (2023); Sameer M. Ashar, *Pedagogy of Prefiguration*, 132 YALE L.J.F. 869, 871 n.8, 877 (2023) (introducing a “prefigurative approach” to reimagine the law as a tool for promoting a radical future that is both inclusive and rooted in care).

118. *About*, MINN. RURAL ELEC. ASS'N, <https://www.mrea.org/about/> [perma.cc/TS4T-ZMRV] (last visited Jan. 21, 2025); Emily Bucholz, Billy Bigham & Maci Burke, *Considerations for Minnesota Agriculture Cooperatives*, MINN. L. REV. DE NOVO BLOG (May 6, 2021), <https://minnesotalawreview.org/2021/05/06/considerations-for-minnesota-agriculture-cooperatives/> [perma.cc/NXR7-VTQM].

seeking relief from stressful ventures. Advocating for start-up grants for cooperative enterprises, along with technical assistance programs, would also be beneficial.

Passing legislation to support nonprofit community land trusts is a viable and transformative initiative that can be implemented with the right policy frameworks and dedicated advocacy efforts.¹¹⁹ This can be achieved by enacting laws that grant community land trusts the first right of refusal to purchase foreclosed or government-owned properties, ensuring access to affordable land before it enters the speculative market.¹²⁰ Additionally, creating funding mechanisms such as public land banks or trust funds specifically allocated for nonprofit community land trusts will enable the acquisition of properties at discounted rates.¹²¹ Tax incentives for developers or private owners who sell properties to community land trusts below market rates can further encourage collaboration between the private sector and community organizations.¹²² Providing property tax exemptions or reduced tax rates for land owned by community land trusts can ease financial burdens and ensure long-term affordability for residents.

Moreover, integrating community land trusts into comprehensive urban planning is essential. Mandating their inclusion in city planning processes will promote equitable land use and help prevent gentrification in redeveloping areas.¹²³ Requiring a portion of new developments or redevelopment projects to include land contributions to community land trusts as part of community benefit agreements is a method for making sure that secure land is available for community use.¹²⁴ Furthermore, advocacy and public awareness campaigns through widely accessible avenues like social media are also critical in developing a positive public perception regarding ACED initiatives and the feasibility of unified progression.

Political and social momentum also favors equity-based solutions that address systemic inequities, particularly for historically marginalized communities.¹²⁵ There is a growing recognition of the need for policies that promote racial and economic justice in housing and land ownership, making community land trusts and shared cooperatives viable.¹²⁶ However, challenges such as securing sufficient public and private funding, overcoming political resistance from commercial entities and real estate developers, and ensuring scalable and adaptable models nationwide must

119. ASHLEY CAMILLE HERNANDEZ, SANDRA MCNEILL & YASMIN TONG, INCREASING COMMUNITY POWER THROUGH COMMUNITY LAND TRUSTS (2020), <https://trustsouthla.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Increasing-Community-Power-Thru-CLTs-REPORT-TCE-BHC-Dec2020.pdf> [perma.cc/UXD9-B9HX].

120. A right of first refusal clause could apply to community residents, giving those familiar with the community the first opportunity to buy the property and make an offer. *Right of First Refusal: A Guide for Real Estate Agents*, NAT'L ASS'N REALTORS, <https://www.nar.realtor/residential-real-estate/right-of-first-refusal> [perma.cc/P4XD-745V] (last visited Jan. 21, 2025).

121. *Community Land Trusts*, NEW SCH.: INST. ON RACE, POWER & POL. ECON., <https://budgetequity.racepowerpolicy.org/case-studies-policy-briefs/community-land-trusts> [perma.cc/ZPK6-NFUH] (last visited Jan. 21, 2025).

122. See generally Miriam Axel-Lute, *Scaling Up: How Some Community Land Trusts Are Getting Bigger*, SHELTERFORCE (July 13, 2021), <https://shelterforce.org/2021/07/13/gaining-scale-how-some-community-land-trusts-are-getting-bigger/> [perma.cc/SM6Q-7E5R].

123. See generally Stephen R. Miller, *Community Land Trusts: Why Now Is the Time to Integrate This Housing Activists' Tool into Local Government Affordable Housing Policies*, 23 J. AFFORDABLE HOUS. & CMTY. DEV. L. 349 (2015).

124. *Id.* at 369–70.

125. Cesar Torres, *Systemic Advocacy*, 72 NWLAWYER 43 (2018).

126. Miller, *supra* note 123.

continuously be addressed.¹²⁷ It may be useful to encourage state legislatures to authorize public banks to prioritize lending to ACED enterprises, offering low-interest loans without the exploitative terms often found in mainstream financial institutions. Through capped interest rates and other beneficial provisions, banks can guarantee transparency and affordability for borrowers with sights toward social impact rather than personal profit. Along with this, existing community-owned credit unions or financial institutions that serve predominantly Black communities may facilitate cooperative investment models.¹²⁸ As credit unions traditionally are restricted in the types of investments they can make, it may be beneficial to grant them legal authority to invest directly into cooperatives. Credit unions, rather than maximizing profits, can provide affordable loans by pulling together their funds along with donated funds, or potentially collaborating with philanthropic foundations to bring affordable loans to businesses and provide special initiatives aimed towards strengthening the community. Strategic advocacy, robust legislative design, and collaboration between governments, nonprofits, and communities are essential to overcoming these obstacles.¹²⁹ These policies, coupled with community organizing and advocacy, can help institutionalize ACED principles, enabling Black communities to build thriving local economies on their own terms.

B. Social and Cultural Dimensions of ACED: Challenges and Pathways to Collective Empowerment

ACED is not purely an economic blueprint; it also holds cultural and social implications. Traditional CED can often treat communities as canvases on which to impose development projects, neglecting the lived experiences, traditions, and social ties that define a neighborhood's character. In contrast, ACED centers cultural continuity and social cohesion. By respecting local traditions, building democratic decision-making channels, and situating economic activity within a broader fabric of cultural life, ACED ensures that development strengthens community bonds rather than eroding them.

Picture a worker-owned grocery store that features goods sourced from local Black farmers and suppliers. As time goes on, it becomes more than just a store; it is now a hub where members gather, share information, and celebrate milestones. Over time, such enterprises can reinforce cultural ties, facilitate intergenerational knowledge transfer, and develop a sense of collective pride or identity. This contrasts with a traditional CED project that might attract larger retail chains that are disconnected from local culture; ACED ensures that economic initiatives reflect

127. See generally, David Fukuzawa, Nancy O. Andrews & Rebecca Steinitz, *A New Paradigm for Community Development Finance*, STAN. SOC. INNOVATION REV. (2025), <https://ssir.org/articles/entry/community-development-finance-philanthropy> [perma.cc/37TK-6VDT].

128. Fred Galves, *The Discriminatory Impact of Traditional Lending Criteria: An Economic and Moral Critique*, 29 SETON HALL L. REV. 1467, 1478 n.18 (1999) ("Perhaps the most remarkable success story, however, was the credit union movement. Credit unions have been around since early in the century. They sprang from the . . . public spirited impulse . . . to facilitate the supply of consumer credit to workers, farmers, and other[s] . . . whose credit needs were not being adequately served by existing banking facilities." (alterations in original) (quoting JONATHAN R. MACEY & GEOFFREY P. MILLER, *BANKING LAW AND REGULATION* 28–29 (2d ed. 1997)); Kelly Culp, Comment, *Banks v. Credit Unions: The Turf Struggle for Consumers*, 53 BUS. LAW. 193, 193–94 (1997).

129. See generally, FRANCESCA POLLETTA, *FREEDOM IS AN ENDLESS MEETING: DEMOCRACY IN AMERICAN SOCIAL MOVEMENTS* (2002).

and enhance the community's distinct character, while building infrastructure that has the potential to become community pillars and strongholds.

It is important to acknowledge that implementing ACED principles requires overcoming significant obstacles.¹³⁰ Cooperatives need start-up capital and training; worker initiatives and community land trusts must navigate complex regulatory systems; and participatory governance processes demand time, patience, and continuous political education. These challenges must not be taken lightly but should not dissuade. Numerous organizations and networks like the U.S. Federation of Worker Cooperatives, the Democracy at Work Institute, and the National Community Land Trust Network already provide technical support, policy guidance, and educational resources.¹³¹

ACED projects have the potential to build alliances with ongoing movements for criminal justice reform, climate justice, and housing rights. By linking economic development to broader social struggles, ACED proponents can build broad-based coalitions that amplify their collective power. For example, environmental justice activists might partner with Black worker-owned solar energy cooperatives in Black communities, creating more green jobs and geographically expanding an environmentally sustainable reach. In essence, ACED's potential lies in its ability to bridge issues and bring people together, united by a common desire for self-determination, equity, and justice. By making economic decisions locally, building shared institutions, and directly confronting the systems that have long entrenched the racial wealth and equity gap for Black Americans, ACED has the potential to do exponentially more than just improve Black neighborhoods; it can transform them into sites of democratic innovation, solidarity, and collective strength.

CONCLUSION

Traditional CED has too often accepted the basic premises of a market-centric economy that privileges external investors, temporary projects, and superficial indicators of growth. As a result, many such initiatives fail to address the long-standing racial injustices and structural inequalities that keep Black communities locked out of wealth-building opportunities. ACED, on the other hand, dares to imagine, and seeks to construct an entirely different future. Rooted in the recognition that racial capitalism and dispossession lie at the heart of economic injustice, ACED pursues transformative change by building community-owned institutions, democratizing decision-making, ensuring long-term affordability and stability, and directly confronting historical inequities.

By aligning economic development with broader movements for radical reform, reparative justice, and community-led governance, ACED demonstrates that neighborhoods can become sites of liberation rather than targets for speculative development. This approach moves beyond the cosmetic fixes of traditional CED to foster sustainable ecosystems that cultivate dignity, empowerment, and genuine self-sufficiency. By drawing on the powerful work of organizations such as

130. Haber, *supra* note 35, at 316.

131. *Co-op Clinic: Technical Assistance Services*, U.S. FED'N WORKER COOPS., <https://www.usworker.coop/clinic/> [perma.cc/E8F8-SY4Q] (last visited Dec. 27, 2025); *About, DEMOCRACY AT WORK INS.*, <https://institute.coop/about> [perma.cc/X3YY-7FYE] (last visited Jan. 7, 2026); *What Is a Worker Cooperative?*, *supra* note 45.

Cooperation Jackson and The Guild, we can begin to learn how to scale ACED initiatives and encourage the Black community to adopt holistic approaches rooted in unity and collective empowerment. ACED aligns with the historical traditions of self-help and collective uplift, exemplified during the Jim Crow era when Black Americans established fraternal orders and mutual benefit societies to survive and thrive despite systemic exclusion from mainstream markets.¹³² These historical practices are revitalized and strengthened within ACED frameworks, which integrate them with modern legal and policy innovations to protect community institutions from predatory market forces and foster sustainable economic autonomy. Using these models, the Black community can build resilient, self-determined systems that emphasize solidarity and shared prosperity.

132. *The Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History: Fraternal Orders, African American*, OKLA. HIST. SOC'Y, <https://www.okhistory.org/publications/enc/entry?entry=FR008> [perma.cc/P2LC-E8UD] (last visited Jan. 22, 2025).