

Black labor history *is* Black history.

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Hi Scott,

Earlier this month, I was interviewed by WBHM, Birmingham's public radio station, for a piece about the city's role in the [intertwined struggles for civil and labor rights](#).

As the article points out, the economic justice aspects of the Civil Rights Movement are often underplayed. But as we finish Black History Month, it's important to emphasize that the struggle for racial and economic justice always go hand in hand.

I've talked before about how we have a lot to do to achieve [true freedom](#) for our country's Black workers. Right now, workers here and around the country are having to work two or three jobs just to make ends meet. Jennifer Bates, who led the fight to try to unionize an Amazon facility in nearby Bessemer, says it best in the WBHM story:

**“A lot of things humans put up with on the job because they have to put food on the table, make sure they have a roof over their family's heads, make sure they have medical insurance.”**

That is not freedom.

I see that most today in our work here in the South, where many companies are building plants to take advantage of the area's reputation for cheap, non-union workforce. As my colleague in Mississippi [Angela Dawson said in an op-ed](#), these companies are perpetuating plantation dynamics almost 100 years after slavery.

We are at the beginning of a brand-new economy, a brand-new type of work, a brand-new type of demand on manufacturing as more and more companies develop the tools we need to fight climate change. What sense does it make to put brand new fancy jobs and brand new fancy buildings on top of old Jim Crow culture? Especially when these companies are getting our tax dollars to do so.

During Black History Month and every month, let's not forget that access to good jobs that allow workers to lead full lives outside of work is key to achieving racial justice.

In solidarity,



**Erica Iheme**  
Co-Executive Director

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