

# Unions: The Equalizing Force

Between 1991 and 2000, the United States and Canada experienced a major economic expansion. Despite unique circumstances contributing to the current recession, it is worthwhile to look back on the so-called “good times” and ask who prospered, who didn’t and why?

In nearly every state, women still earn less than men, African Americans earn less than white workers and median hourly wages in many states remain below 1979 levels. A recent survey of working families in Ohio confirmed the undemocratic nature of the most recent economic expansion.

The positive effect of union membership was among the few bright spots in the Ohio study. Unionized workers in the Buckeye State enjoyed higher overall wages and saw less income variation between male and female and black and white workers. Only education was a greater factor in determining higher median household income than union membership.

Among the Ohio study’s highlights:

- A unionized workplace substantially reduces the wage gap between men and women, while raising the wages of both genders. On average, union women in Ohio earned 23.8 percent more than non-union women workers.
- The union premium dramatically reduces race-based wage inequality. African-American workers in unions earned 32 percent more than non-union African-American workers.
- Unions also reduce the differential between lower and higher educated employees. Union workers with a high school diploma earned 26.6 percent more than workers with the same education level in similar non-union positions.

As workers across North America search for ways to survive and improve their standing in the current workforce, union representation continues to provide answers. As they have been for years, unions are still the key to a stronger, better paid, less discriminatory and more democratic workforce.

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**Have you heard?**

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