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The Civil Rights Struggle for True Full Employment

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I. Introduction: Full Employment and the Black Freedom Movement

In 1942, civil rights organizer Bayard Rustin reported back to his fellow activists about the mood in Black communities. "'How can I get a decent job?' is invariably the question," he wrote (Rustin 2012). At the time of Rustin's writing, unemployment was 3.26 percent (National Bureau of Economic Research n.d.). Despite historically low unemployment levels, Black workers still clamored for quality jobs. Although significantly softened by the tight labor market, discrimination in hiring based on race, gender, and age persisted (National Resources Planning Board 1942; Anderson 1982, 82). As Rustin's observation underscored, generally low unemployment rates were not a panacea for broader social ills. Low overall unemployment oriented the compass, but it was not the destination in and of itself.

In 1944, as many began to look forward to the end of World War II, policymakers and communities worried about a resurgence of unemployment and the fate of returning soldiers. In response to these trepidations, "full employment" became the watchword for postwar policy, and Congress debated legislation to achieve it, including how precisely to define it. Some, like W.E.B. Du Bois, questioned whether full employment was being treated as a goal for all or some, emphasizing the need for it to apply to all people. "We want the white laborer . . . to receive a living wage and economic security without periodic unemployment," he wrote. "But we have little or no thought of colored labor" (Du Bois 1944, 453–54). In the years since Du Bois's writings, Black freedom movements have consistently demanded *true* full employment—full enough to apply to workers who face discrimination and those who live in areas vulnerable to capital flight and low investment, and thus high levels of unemployment (Hafiz 2023).

This brief argues that the term full employment has been distorted since the 1970s, often referring to generally low overall unemployment rates—the rate that economists and policymakers believe will prevent inflation—rather than zero involuntary unemployment. Although preferable to higher unemployment, this contemporary definition is not what civil rights activists like Du Bois, Rustin, Sadie Alexander, or Coretta Scott King fought for. When protesters at the 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom held signs reading "Civil rights + full employment = freedom," they were not seeking to return to the economy of 1956—a year that would fit the currently dominant definition of full employment, but falls short of aspirations for true full employment. That year, the white unemployment rate was 3.3 percent and the overall unemployment rate was 4.1 percent. Yet the "non-white" unemployment rate was 7.5 percent (Kessler 1963). The activists who marched on Washington a few years later wanted something better than this. They wanted to eradicate involuntary unemployment, and they emphasized not just issues of job availability but also the quality and dignity of those jobs.

Sections II and III of this brief discuss the importance of full employment to the Black freedom movement. They outline the legislative and activist struggles from the 1940s to the 1970s that shaped the concept of full employment, culminating in the Humphrey-Hawkins Act of 1978. Section IV highlights how full employment as a policy choice was misdefined and deprioritized—exemplified by the Volcker shock—leading to a long-standing conflict between two opposing definitions of "full employment": the "true" full employment tradition, rooted in anti-racism and other progressive values, and the NAIRU (Non-accelerating Inflation Rate of Unemployment) tradition, which diluted the meaning of full employment and emphasized it as a purely quantitative ideal (Tcherneva 2014; Paul, Darity, and Hamilton 2018). Section V explores the consequences of this deprioritization, particularly for Black and other marginalized Americans. We show that the NAIRU framework, which has been the dominant definition since the 1970s, has disproportionately negatively impacted marginalized communities, especially Black Americans.

However one defines "full employment," the tragic history is that—even by common quantitative standards that set full employment at approximately 5 percent—Black workers have, at best, experienced it for one month in the past 70 years (Bureau of Labor Statistics n.d.). The post-lockdown economic recovery since April 2021 has contributed to the resilience of the current labor market and relatively low unemployment rates in 2023 and into 2024. April 2023 saw overall unemployment rates of 3.4 percent and Black unemployment rates of 4.7 percent, marking the first time the Black unemployment rate was below 5 percent since 1972 (Bureau of Labor Statistics n.d.).[1] (The previously recorded lowest Black unemployment level was 5.3 percent in September 2019 [Bureau of Labor Statistics 2019].) Before 1972, when Black unemployment data was not separately recorded, proxy statistics saw their lowest levels only during World War II and the Korean War, when the non-white unemployment rate also dropped below 5 percent.[2] These brief moments when non-white unemployment was below 5 percent—1943–44, 1951–53, and April 2023—underscore that elevated rates of unemployment among Black workers are not natural (Kessler 1963).[3] Rather, they clarify the necessity of policy remedies. Such policies were innovated by Black freedom movements throughout the post–World War II period, as they sought a federal jobs guarantee and robust nondiscrimination enforcement as the means to achieve true full employment.

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[1] In April 2023, Black unemployment briefly fell to 4.7 percent (from 5 percent in March 2023). It rose to 5.6 percent the following month.

[2] Such recognition adds weight to Coretta Scott King's 1975 statement, "This nation has never honestly dealt with the question of a peacetime economy" (Stein 2016).

[3] Data on non-white unemployment prior to 1947 is limited. We thus make our assessment based on qualitative research and scholarship (Anderson 1982) and the fact that overall unemployment averaged 1.89 percent in 1943 and 1.22 percent in 1944. Thus, if the non-white unemployment rate followed the post-World War II differential, which saw African American and non-white unemployment rates at approximately twice the overall rate, the unemployment rate would be between 2.5–4 percent for African American and non-white workers in 1943–44.

II. The Struggle for True Full Employment: The 1960s and the March on Washington

The 1945 Full Employment Bill was the legislative form of broader desires for full employment and an expanded social welfare state driving post–World War II policy. This effort was pushed by organized labor and the developing civil rights movement, but it faced legislative opposition from a bloc of southern congressmen, many of whose power rested on Jim Crow rule. Ultimately, this struggle culminated in the Employment Act of 1946 (Bailey 1957). The new law was both a landmark policy that declared maximum employment, production, and purchasing power as the goal of the federal government, and simultaneously a significantly weakened version of the previous bill. Unlike its predecessor, the 1946 Act did not affirm full employment as a right and lacked emphasis on the practical and enabling measures necessary for the realization of true full employment.

Over the subsequent decades, the vision of full employment that had underpinned the struggle for the 1945 bill was kept alive by the civil rights movement, and it found new expressions in the 1960s. Civil rights activists, including A. Philip Randolph and Bayard Rustin, advocated for full employment and economic rights, highlighting the role of structural unemployment in the economy. They called for a federal Public Works Program, a federal Fair Employment Practices Act, and a higher national minimum wage.

When Randolph tasked Rustin with planning a march on Washington for economic rights in 1963, the economic climate was dire for Black workers, and had been exacerbated by recent recessions in 1957–58 and 1960–61. Yet the relative recovery between the recessions was no salve either, as the unemployment rate dropped only marginally. The non-white unemployment rate—the best approximation for the Black unemployment rate—was 12.6 percent in 1958, 10.7 percent in 1959, 10.2 percent in 1960, 12.5 percent in 1961, 11 percent in 1962, and 10.9 percent in 1963 (Kessler 1963).

In outlining their economic analysis for the march, Rustin and his colleagues highlighted the role of structural unemployment in the state of the economy. Throughout the post–World War II era, there had been significant debates among Keynesian economists about the nature of unemployment—whether it reflected structural deficiencies or cyclical problems resulting from business cycle movements such as a downturn in the economy (Mucciaroni 1990, 19–40). Rustin and his colleagues took a clear side. "The current crisis is overwhelmingly the result of structural unemployment," they wrote (Rustin, Kahn, and Hill 2012, 255–56). Rustin and Randolph crafted their demands from an analytical framework that honored the goals of true full employment, calling attention to the need for multidimensional policy interventions. As they noted in the march's first organizing manual, they sought:

> A massive Federal Public Works Program to provide jobs for all the unemployed and Federal legislation to promote an expanding economy.
> A Federal Fair Employment Practices Act to bar job discrimination by Federal, State, and Municipal governments, and by private employers, contractors, employment agencies and trade unions.
> Broadening the federal Fair Labor Standards Act to include the uncovered areas of employment where Negroes and other minorities work at slave wages; and establishment of a national minimum wage of not less than $2.00 per hour. (Rustin and Robinson 1963)

Sixty years ago, when 250,000 people took buses and trains to Washington, DC, calling for full employment, these were their dreams. They wanted full employment to finally apply to people who faced discrimination; they wanted the equivalent of a $20-per-hour minimum wage. These activists wanted to displace the policymakers who had previously stifled the 1945 Full Employment Bill and to use Congress's power of the purse for economic justice.

But following the March on Washington in August 1963, President John F. Kennedy and other policymakers failed to address the economic demands of the activists. "Congress has scarcely noticed the full objective of the protest," the *New York Times* reported (Reston 1963). Rather than tackling the macroeconomic sources of unemployment, Kennedy instead suggested that Black Americans focus on education, which ultimately avoided the macroeconomic and policy questions that Rustin and Randolph sought to foreground (John F. Kennedy Presidential Library 1963; Branch 1989).

However, some legislators, namely Representative Augustus Hawkins (D-CA), understood the issues well. Hawkins represented Watts, California, and had recently been elected as the first Black House member from the West. He collaborated with President Franklin D. Roosevelt's son, Representative Jimmy Roosevelt (D-CA), to create Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, which prohibited employment discrimination and created the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC). The creation of the EEOC was a victory, almost 20 years later, for those activists like Randolph who had sought a permanent Fair Employment Practices Commission after World War II.

The March's economic recommendations also became the foundation of Randolph and Rustin's call for a "Freedom Budget" to address the country's unmet needs—needs that private investment saw little utility in responding to—including public works to build schools, hospitals, and libraries. Randolph, Rustin, and economist Leon Keyserling worked on a fleshed-out version of the Freedom Budget, which proposed "guaranteed full employment, adequate minimum wages, guaranteed incomes, a decent home for every family, full educational opportunity, updated social security and welfare programs, and equitable tax and mone[tary] policies." Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. wrote the foreword to a summary edition of the plan, and it garnered support from a long list of prominent civil rights activists, labor leaders, and economists (A. Philip Randolph Institute 1966).

But the Democrats' losses in the 1966 midterms derailed the possibility of the Freedom Budget's enactment. Nevertheless, Randolph and Rustin continued building support and drafted the National Purposes Act of 1968, which aimed to broaden national economic programs and policies for social and human purposes. These legislative ambitions were stifled by the 1968 election results and Richard Nixon's presidency, leaving the policy struggle to wait for another political opportunity.

III. Renewed Pursuit of Full Employment: The Humphrey-Hawkins Act

During Nixon's second term, in response to fiscal austerity and high interest rates, Rep. Hawkins and Coretta Scott King renewed their advocacy for true full employment, a federal job guarantee, and a socially just way to manage inflation. In their advocacy, they made it a point to assert that full employment meant no involuntary unemployment.

In 1974, Scott King collaborated with labor leaders to create the National Committee for Full Employment and the Full Employment Action Council (NCFE/FEAC), while Hawkins, with the support of Sen. Hubert Humphrey (D-MN), drafted a bill to give their vision policy teeth. As debates over what was meant by "full employment" became increasingly prevalent, the NCFE saw cause to clarify what they meant by the term in their initial statement of purpose:

> The past three decades have also seen the rise of a sophisticated 'numbers game' whereby 'full employment' is defined as an ever-increasing percentage of <u>un</u>employment. For us and for the nation, unemployment at <u>any rate</u> is unacceptable. For us, full employment means <u>no</u> involuntary unemployment. (National Committee for Full Employment 1974)

This statement echoed earlier remarks from the organization's founding gathering, which described the actions of the Nixon administration as "complicated sophistry . . . to camouflage the basic fact that they are defining 'full employment' to be whatever [is] convenient" (Woodcock 1974). As such, Scott King's coalition saw combating the muddled definition of full employment as a core part of their agenda.

Similarly, in Hawkins's initial bill, he and his colleagues emphasized that full employment meant no involuntary unemployment. Accordingly, their drafted bill proposed local planning councils and a local Job Guarantee Office to match job seekers with suitable employment opportunities. The bill clarified that other economic circumstances, such as inflation, could not be used as excuses for nonenforcement of the provision for the right to a job (Hawkins 1974, 2). They received support from both the House and the Senate, and the bill also saw a recently elected Senator Joe Biden (D-DE) serving as a cosponsor (Hawkins 1974, 10).

But Scott King and Hawkins understood that their program stood little chance of legislative action while conservative voices like Gerald Ford, William Simon, and Alan Greenspan presided over the White House's economic policy. On the seventh anniversary of her husband's assassination, Scott King testified before Congress in support of the legislation. She recounted the attitude at the 1974 White House inflation summit, saying, "It was very calmly assumed that greater numbers of American workers must lose their jobs [to become] frontline soldiers in the battle against inflation." Scott King argued that in contrast, "full employment, a job for every American who needs one, is a real and possible goal if we would choose to make it a national priority" (Scott King 1975).

Such a view was affirmed in the 1976 Democratic Party platform, which declared full employment legislation as one of its key goals. "The Democratic Party is committed to the right of all adult Americans willing, able, and seeking work to have opportunities for useful jobs at living wages," it stated (American Presidency Project 1976). Although he initially supported Scott King's coalition, as president, Jimmy Carter turned away from the principles espoused by Hawkins, Humphrey, and NCFE/FEAC.

Despite a bruising legislative road similar to the struggle in the 1940s, the Humphrey-Hawkins Act was eventually passed in 1978. Like the recently passed Federal Reserve Reform Act of 1977, it committed the Federal Reserve to an employment mandate. Many policymakers like Sen. Humphrey and Bertram Gross, a Senate staffer who drafted much of the 1945 version of the full employment bill, believed such a mandate had already existed under the 1946 Employment Act. But the reality was that the Fed did not behave as if it did, thus prompting the need for the 1977 and 1978 laws (Gross 1974, 43–44; Stein 2019).

Though weakened, the still-substantive version of the new full employment law now directed the president to pursue policies that reduced the unemployment rate to below 3 percent for workers over the age of 20 and below 4 percent for workers under the age of 20. While the law now had a mandate to lower inflation, it also noted that "policies and programs for reducing the rate of inflation shall be designed so as not to impede achievement of the [employment] goals and timetables specified . . . for the reduction of unemployment" (Full Employment and Balanced Growth Act 1978). Hawkins believed such a provision would finally prioritize employment goals in the eyes of the Fed. The law also mandated that twice per year, the Fed chair would provide Congress with analyses of monetary policy and its implications for the law's goals. These testimonies have come to be known as the Humphrey-Hawkins hearings, and their aim was to provide an opportunity for Congress to hold the Fed accountable to its legal directives, especially the employment mandate. The law also included a provision around fair employment:

> Every effort shall be made to reduce those differences between the rates of unemployment among youth, women, minorities, handicapped persons, veterans, middle-aged and older persons, and other labor force groups and the overall rate of unemployment which are caused by any improper factors with the ultimate objective of removing such differentials to the extent possible. (Full Employment and Balanced Growth Act 1978)

This expansive language of "labor market groups" is especially important today, since—if vigorously enforced—it could be applied to groups like formerly imprisoned workers and transgender workers, who currently face great degrees of employment discrimination and elevated rates of unemployment.[4]

IV. Disregarding the Humphrey-Hawkins Act: "Volcker Shock" and Beyond

The Humphrey-Hawkins Act, aimed at addressing unemployment, was largely disregarded in the late 1970s and 1980s as Federal Reserve Chair Paul Volcker implemented a series of measures known as the "Volcker shock." Even before this, however, Hawkins feared the law would suffer a fate similar to the inadequate enforcement of the 1946 Employment Act. "The Humphrey-Hawkins Act is being violated," he titled a 1979 article published in the September-October issue of the economics journal *Challenge*. He enumerated five violations, including to the fair employment provisions, and noted that economic policies at the time revealed "a basic disregard of the mandates and goals of the Humphrey-Hawkins Act" (Hawkins 1979, 55-6). Still, his article was published before the worst was to come.

In 1979, Volcker executed the infamous Volcker shock, a pivotal event for consolidating the neoliberal era via an unprecedented series of interest rate hikes starting in October 1979, followed by a second cycle of tightening in August 1980. Volcker sought to focus Fed policy on managing the money supply directly, in a "monetarist" experiment that was largely about giving the Fed political cover from policymakers like Hawkins. The effective federal funds rate (the weighted average rate for the transactions between banks, which is market-determined but heavily influenced by the Federal Reserve's target rate) rose sharply from 11.43 percent to 13.77 percent between September and October 1980, eventually peaking above 19 percent (Federal Reserve Board 2024). By contributing to the deteriorating economy under President Carter, the Fed's hikes helped usher Ronald Reagan into the presidency and further undermined working-class communities.

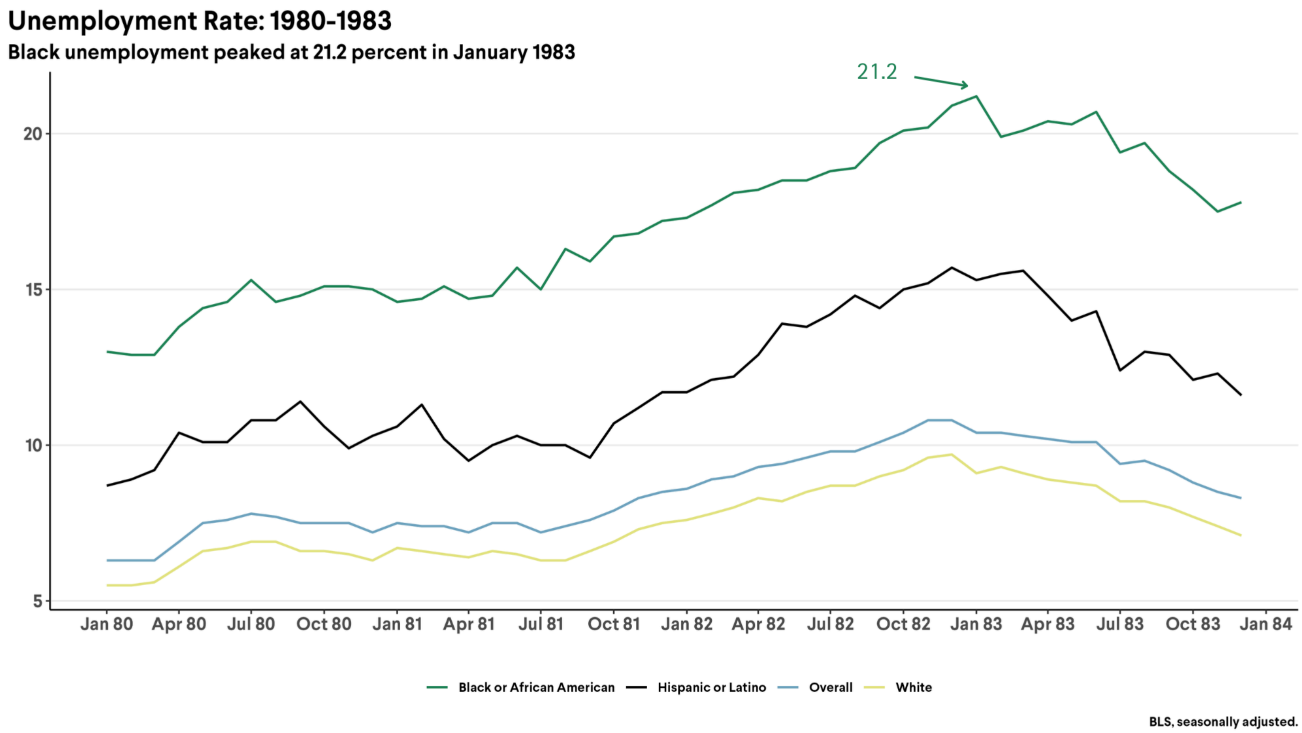
[4] See Movement Advancement Project et al. 2013; Wang and Bertram 2022.

Despite the Humphrey-Hawkins Act's attempt to clarify that unemployment was not to be subordinate to inflation, Volcker stated bluntly in his first Humphrey-Hawkins testimony after the shock that he would first focus on inflation to address unemployment. Under questioning about such a decision from the Congressional Black Caucus's Rep. Parren Mitchell (D-MD), a leading advocate of Humphrey-Hawkins, Volcker inverted the animating aims of the legislation. "We are not going to get the unemployment objective if we continue to be plagued by accelerating inflation and inflationary psychology," he said, effectively deprioritizing the employment mandate (Volcker 1980). In a 2013 interview, when asked about his perspective on the Fed's dual mandate, he eschewed the more stylized reasoning that he had used at that 1980 hearing. Then, he replied concisely, "I'm against it" (Feldstein 2013).

V. The Cost of a Shock: Impact on Marginalized Communities

Since the monetary tightening of 1979, the collective disregard of the true ethos of the full employment movement and the relative overemphasis on aggregate quantitative metrics of unemployment has had a deleterious impact on the well-being of communities of color, especially Black Americans. Following two monetary tightening cycles between 1979 and 1980, the overall unemployment rate reached a peak of 10.8 percent in December 1982. The white unemployment rate peaked at 9.7 percent in January 1983, while the Black unemployment rate peaked at a shocking 21.2 percent in the same month (Figure 1). The unemployment gap between white communities and communities of color also widened following recessions in the 1980s.

Figure 1



In this way, the Volcker shock had a profound impact on communities of color, contributing to an increase in unemployment among these communities. This represented a significant socioeconomic shift, the effects of which can still be felt today in the form of persistent economic inequality. In addition to the legacy of undermining the core principle of full employment, the Volcker shock solidified two key economic beliefs that have been relevant to the fight against inflation in the post-pandemic period. First, it affirmed the macroeconomic belief that the goal of full employment is secondary to that of inflation control, even if such an approach results in higher unemployment rates. Second, Volcker repeatedly stressed the importance of wage restraint, advocated for a slower growth in nominal wages, and saw short-term unemployment increases as a by-product of the quest for price stability.[5] Despite being politically unpopular, rate hikes were, and still are, considered by the Fed and some policymakers to be a necessary measure to prevent and reverse inflation, which remains a top priority for those experts. This perspective has justified the imposition of stringent economic measures, often relegating labor welfare to a secondary position compared to inflation control.

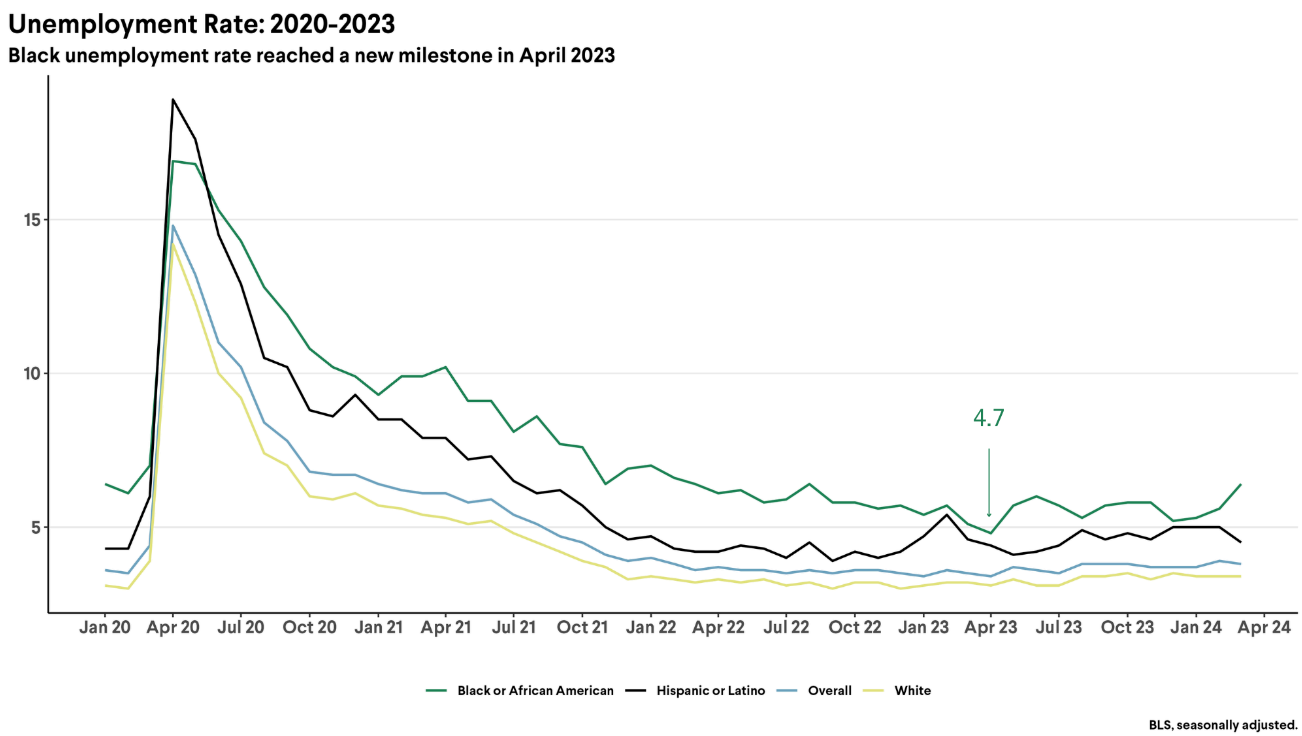
In March 2022, more than 30 years after the Volcker shock, Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell initiated a series of rapid interest rate hikes in response to inflationary

[5] Volcker said in his statement to the Joint Economic Committee in 1982: "In this situation, one key policy objective must be to 'build in' what has so far been a partly cyclical decline in inflation, to encourage further reductions in the rate of increase in nominal costs and wages, and then to establish clearly a trend toward price stability" (Joint Economic Committee 1982).

pressures seen in the aftermath of a global pandemic that put most of the economy in a sudden lockdown. The rate hikes lasted until July 2023 and raised the interest rates to a range of 5.25–5.5 percent.

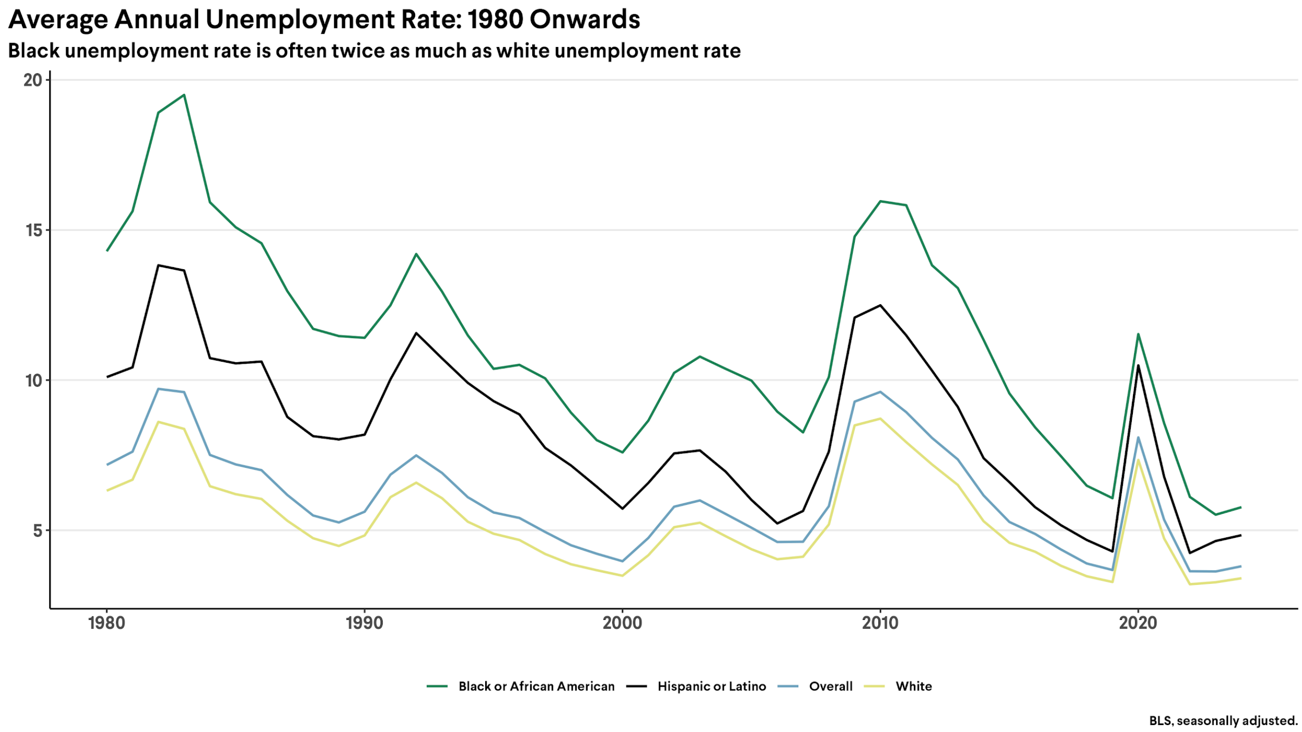
Despite the fluctuating economic climate and rate hikes, the labor market has shown remarkable resilience, maintaining lower unemployment rates than those before the pandemic. However, we must also acknowledge that we have not been able to preserve all the significant gains made during the recovery period following the pandemic. In March 2022, when the Federal Reserve cited "an extremely tight labor market" and inflation as factors necessitating a series of aggressive rate hikes, the national average unemployment rate was 3.6 percent. For Black Americans, that unemployment rate was 6.2 percent (Powell 2022; Bureau of Labor Statistics 2022). Although the Black unemployment rate has decreased since then—and even hit a milestone low of 4.7 percent in April 2023—today, it has risen back to 6.4 percent (as of March 2024). Maintaining progress as the Fed tightened has proven to be a challenge.

Figure 2



The concept of sacrificing progression in the labor market in an attempt to control inflation spotlights the influence of Milton Friedman's theory concerning the Non-accelerating Inflation Rate of Unemployment. The NAIRU or natural rate of unemployment represents the rate of unemployment to which an economy tends to return in the long run. The concept was solidified in practice by the series of interest rate hikes implemented by Volcker. The lingering high unemployment rates after the Volcker shock (Figure 3) and the reversal in the decreasing Black unemployment rate in the past year (Figure 2) both exemplify this concept that the economy cannot dip below a certain rate of unemployment without entering a period of instability (Galbraith 1997; Barker 2019).

Figure 3



Despite substantial evidence against its effectiveness, this theory still influences economic decision-making. But it is plausible to expect that with a more nuanced and appropriate response, we could have retained even lower levels of unemployment while simultaneously keeping a tight grip on inflation following the economic recovery of 2022. This argument holds more weight given that the recent deceleration in inflation can be attributed largely to factors unrelated to interest rates, such as supply chain adjustments to the economic reopening in the aftermath of the pandemic and the Russian invasion of Ukraine (Konczal 2023). The crucial role of these external factors—along with the rise of corporate profits fueling price increases—reinforces the potential of maintaining lower unemployment rates without spiraling into uncontrollable inflation. Such a recognition should also prompt a reevaluation of what a socially just mode of inflation management should look like—compelling us to prioritize policies that encourage investment and combat excessive profiteering over the aggressive use of policies like rate hikes that are destined to hurt the labor market.

The unfortunate legacy of the Volcker shock and the preceding dilution of the idea of true full employment is a willingness to accept higher rates of unemployment for marginalized communities as the norm. Indeed, the Congressional Budget Office even assumes that the natural rate of unemployment for Black Americans is 10 percent

(Williams 2021). This trend, in which Black unemployment is twice as much as white unemployment, is not an anomaly and instead has become a consistent feature of the American labor market. Hispanic or Latinx unemployment rates are similarly much higher than the overall unemployment rate. Historically, the average unemployment rate for Black men since 1980 has been at around 12 percent, and at 10.7 percent for Black women, 5.5 percent for white men, and 5.2 percent for white women.

We are fortunate that the remarkably hot labor market of 2022 has enabled us to withstand the potentially hazardous impact of aggressive monetary tightening. However, despite this hot labor market and historically low levels of Black unemployment, Black Americans still face unemployment rates significantly higher than their white counterparts. And prevailing concerns about inflation and a continued willingness to accept high Black unemployment rates as "natural" still threatens the progress made by Black communities.

Although the unemployment rate did not rise to the levels predicted by the Federal Reserve, according to its 2023 forecasts, the Fed was willing to accept an increased overall unemployment rate of up to 4.6 percent, which would have implied a Black unemployment rate at least higher than 7 percent (Federal Reserve Board 2023). The Fed's willingness to accept much higher rates of unemployment for Black communities offers valuable insight into how broader economic strategies affect different demographic groups. Even under tight labor markets, without dedicated efforts to reduce the persistent gap between Black and white unemployment rates, broad gains may spread into marginalized communities, but inequalities will persist.

VI. Conclusion

The year 2023 marked the 60th anniversary of the March on Washington, and the vision of true full employment remains relevant. The past few years have seen robust conversations around the labor market, and we must hold two emerging truths together. One: Buoyed by the power of a large fiscal policy response to the pandemic—the American Rescue Plan and the Inflation Reduction Act—the economy is as strong as it has been in a generation. And two: There is still a significant way to go in achieving the economic vision of true full employment that the civil rights movement fought for, to say nothing of the movement's more comprehensive economic agenda.

As the economy recovered from the pandemic-induced recession and entered into a phase with historically low levels of unemployment, not everybody considered this a positive. Some economists and policymakers expressed heightened anxiety about inflation and high wages, and some experts deemed it necessary to rein in the gains in the labor market if these victories came at the expense of rising inflation.[6] As mentioned earlier, the prioritization of targeting inflation over employment in this situation has occurred before, with disastrous consequences that helped consolidate the neoliberal era. The original activists of the full employment movement sought, under the Humphrey-Hawkins Act, to prevent and explicitly prohibit strategies that favor inflation reduction over curbing unemployment. The repeated violations of the full employment principles underlying the law have kept us from fully realizing the gains from labor victories and have continued to perpetuate inequalities.

Recently, President Biden emphasized principles behind the Humphrey-Hawkins Act, saying in Chicago in 2023, "Every American . . . should be able to get a job no matter where they are" (Biden 2023). Scott King, Hawkins, and the civil rights activists who fought for full and fair employment would likely add: No matter *who* you are, regardless of race, ethnicity, religion, gender identification, sexuality, age, educational history, previous criminal legal system involvement, and so on. A whole-of-government approach is needed to realize this vision, one that includes robust antidiscrimination enforcement alongside permanent public works programs and a federal jobs guarantee as part of a holistic industrial strategy (Tcherneva 2014; Hafiz 2023). Without a commitment to public investment for the public good, we risk repeating the errors that have made the status quo of relative economic health intolerable for Black workers and workers who face discrimination.

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[6] There is ample evidence that the inflation since the economic reopening in April 2021 is the result of supply shocks and sectoral demand shifts rather than an increase in aggregate demand or tight labor conditions. (Stiglitz and Regmi 2023)

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