



# REALIZING POSSIBILITIES

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# OF THE | CONNECTED ECONOMY

Innovative Ideas  
To Tackle Extreme  
Inequality and Drive  
Enduring Prosperity

*by Mark Gomez*





This essay is published by the Haas Institute for a Fair and Inclusive Society at the University of California, Berkeley. Essays published by the Haas Institute are opinion pieces and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Haas Institute or UC Berkeley.

The Haas Institute for a Fair and Inclusive Society brings together researchers, community stakeholders, policymakers and communicators to identify and challenge the barriers to an inclusive, just, and sustainable society and create transformative change. The Institute serves as a national hub of a vibrant network of researchers and community partners and takes a leadership role in translating, communicating, and facilitating research, policy and strategic engagement. The Haas Institute advances research and policy related to marginalized people while essentially touching all who benefit from a truly diverse, fair, and inclusive society.



The **Leap Forward Project** at the Haas Institute is dedicated to facilitating the research and development of innovative ideas to tackle extreme inequality and drive enduring prosperity. We work collaboratively beyond silos with community organizations, labor unions, issue advocates and think tanks and provocative thought leaders.

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Mark Gomez** is the founder of the Leap Forward Project at the Haas Institute. For a more than a decade, he was a strategist with the California's Justice for Janitors campaign that lifted 25,000 hard working immigrants out of poverty. At the community group ACORN, he led legislative campaigns to win protections for renters. At SOL, a Latino civic engagement organization, he developed innovative story telling workshop series. Mark studied history and economics at the University of Chicago and Cornell University. He enjoys watching films and movies from back in time and around the world. Mark was born in Havana, Cuba, grew up in New York City, began his career in Washington D.C., and now calls San Francisco home.

#### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thank you to Bradley Fabro Afroilan for research, endnotes, and copyediting assistance; to Ebonye Gussine Wilkins for copyediting; to Rachelle Galloway-Popotas for design and layout; to Phuong Tseng for mapping assistance; to Eli Moore and Stephen Menendian for review and insightful feedback.

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# IN THIS ESSAY

## PART 1

### **The Connected Economy is Half Built**

We are blessed with unimagined progress and remarkable prosperity. That progress and prosperity suggests what is possible. We are frustrated, but make no mistake about it—we can all thrive.

### **We're in a Formative Political Period**

We are between what was and what will be. Liberalism has passed into the night. Conservatism is unraveling. What's next is up to those who have been excluded from the prosperity they make possible.

## PART 2

### **Tinkering Sparks Significant Gains**

For a generation, progress-minded activists have tinkered with old Liberal efforts to fight poverty. Their work has proven that renewed progress is possible. We can do far better than merely moving people out of poverty.

### **Bringing Together New Thinking**

Progress-minded activists have reimagined how we see the economy, talk about the economy, measure the economy, and inspire people to change the economy.

## PART 3

### **The Prosperous Rely on Miserly Paid Workers**

Tech firms focus on what they do best. To prosper, they rely on contractors to do what they do best, and to keep their workers happy, they rely on local restaurants, shops and services to do the same.

### **A Targeted Universal Strategy**

Everyone that works can enjoy economic security. Prosperous regions need to set better wage standards, and prosperous industries need to contribute to the wages of less prosperous industries.

### **The Back Will Lead Us into a New Era of Prosperity**

We will realize the possibilities of the Connected Economy only when those who have been held back the longest—African Americans and immigrants—finally have their hard work rewarded.

# Preface

What do we want out of life? Are we fulfilling our hopes and dreams for ourselves and for those we love? And if not, what can we do about it? Too often, we race ahead to engage in analysis before reminding ourselves where we are trying to go. So let's begin this essay at the beginning.

We aspire to a better life. We work hard. We pursue our passions. We want little more than to enjoy our friends and family. We want to be a part of something bigger than ourselves, to feel like we belong. As best we can, we take care of our loved ones and we contribute to the communities we call home.<sup>1</sup>

We came here, to wherever home is today, not merely to escape what was, but to prosper—to enjoy the good life. We came from the other side of state, from across the country, and from around the world. We have progressed, though never as far as our dreams. And even though we did not fulfill our dreams, we still believe that we should do better than our parents.<sup>2</sup>

For the first time in generations, that very American Dream of progress seems fanciful to most. Yet many of us—especially the newcomers—are determined not to accept a lesser fate. We refuse to be held back by anyone.<sup>3</sup>



# Introduction

**THIS IS A SPECULATIVE, HOPEFUL, ESSAY.** It's a California story, informed by a generation of community and labor activism that took flight after the overwhelming passage of anti-immigrant Proposition 187.<sup>4</sup> Its writing finished just weeks after the stunning passage of a \$15 wage standard in The City of Angels.

We are today at a moment of unrealized possibilities, blessed with a remarkably prosperous economy and a formative period in our politics. Within this generation, those who have been held back the longest—African Americans and immigrants—will lead our economy forward into a new era of enduring prosperity. Their leadership will strengthen an embattled aging white middle class.

This is neither a policy agenda nor a history of what went wrong. Nor is it an analysis of our economic crisis. This is a brief essay—a try to develop ideas—with very modest goals.

**Part 1.** It suggests an innovative framework of analysis—a way to think about our Connected Economy, a way to think about political change.

**Part 2.** It focuses on the unheralded work of a generation of progress-minded activists who fought to lift workers out of poverty, and who reimagined the way they organized—crafting new narratives, invoking cognitive frames, and thinking bigger.

**Part 3.** From its understanding of the connected economy, this essay retools two old school policies as an example how we can build on the possibilities of this moment in time.

