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Event: CBTU Region 1 Conference

Dates: August 14-17, 2014

The theme for this year's conference was "Walking in the Same Direction – I am my Brothers and Sisters Keeper". This theme highlighted the need for us all to come together to conquer the many challenges we face within our unions and communities. To fight these challenges we need to walk in the same direction while being our brothers and sisters keeper. Historically, the fights for civil rights, voting rights, labor rights, and basic human rights have been won not just by those who were affected, but by a movement of people who believed that an injury to one is an injury to all. This conference was a call for us to get back to the grassroots efforts to educate, mobilize and organize our brothers and sisters.

To illustrate how it takes more than just those directly involved, the short documentary, "At the River I Stand" was shown. This documentary examines the 1968 sanitation workers strike which brought Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. to Memphis. We saw how the local leaders worked together and called upon national leaders to help solidify and unify the effort. Although the sanitation workers affiliated with AFSCME, there was still a long battle for their rights to be recognized by management and the city's mayor.

The workshops presented kept to the theme by making us aware of our accountability as members of the communities we are engaging, and how our actions and decisions affect our roles as activists. In the "Telling Our Stories" workshop we discussed the role our families play in our lives, our histories and our jobs. As an interactive piece, we paired with another attendee to share what our biggest influence was when it came to activism and our union work and what the "ah ha" moment was for us. We then examined that and made inferences about the paths we have taken to this point as well as what we anticipated for our future actions, both personally and within our work as union activists.

The "Engaging and Involving Our Communities" hammered home the need for us to make our agenda relevant to the community at large. Also, we as union activists and civil rights activists have to be aware of the needs of the community. One of the examples used was a book drive that provided 40,000 books for a Long Island community that sustained severe flooding in the recent past. The CBTU chapter, along with the other AFL-CIO constituency groups such as CLUW, APRI, etc. joined with faith based groups and various community members to supply books for the children of the community. The joint effort made a lasting impression on all involved and helped to forge coalitions that will be utilized in the future.

Overall this conference was refreshing and motivating. The entire time discussion was encouraged and animated dialogues took place that tested the ideas put forth and rendered legitimate and practical action plans for us to take back to our respective communities.