

CRAIN'S

NEW YORK BUSINESS

March 29, 2015

Letters to the Editor

Behind construction's racial divide

A reader provides more context to a story about the lack of African-Americans in the construction industry.

UNIONS FOSTER DIVERSITY

"Blacks missing out on construction jobs" doesn't tell the whole story. While 13% of construction workers in the city are black, among unionized workers it's 21.3%, according to an Economic Policy Institute study. That is close to the 23.3% who are black in the overall workforce.

It's in nonunion construction where blacks are severely underrepresented: 13.8%, according to EPI. On top of this, a Columbia University study on the Edward J. Malloy Construction Skills pre-apprenticeship program reported that almost 90% of the enrolled youth are black, Hispanic or Asian, with 100% coming from the five boroughs.

We have made great strides to diversify the trades with initiatives like our pre-apprenticeship program, which is a strong indicator of the future makeup of the unionized construction industry. We do agree with Mr. David, however, that the lack of health insurance is in fact a "stain" on the nonunion sector. All union members receive middle-class wages and good benefits.

Gary Labarbera

President

Building and Construction Trades Council of Greater New York

