

PRRAC

Poverty & Race Research Action Council

3000 Connecticut Avenue NW • Suite 200 • Washington, DC 20008 • 202/387-9887 • Fax 202/387-0764
www.prrac.org

PRRAC in 2004

2004 has been a transitional and rebuilding year for PRRAC, including the hiring of a new Executive Director, Office Manager and Research Associate, and a shift in responsibility for Chester Hartman, who is now PRRAC Director of Research. We have tried to build on the success of past PRRAC projects, improve our infrastructure, and forge ahead with several new substantive projects. This report summarizes some of the highlights of the past year.

PRRAC's clearinghouse role

Since PRRAC's founding in 1990, we have worked to connect advocates with social scientists working on structural inequality issues involving race and poverty. In 2004, we have continued to improve this core function of PRRAC. First, we have strategically expanded the circulation of PRRAC's flagship publication ***Poverty & Race*** from less than 1000 in January to 5500 in the September/October issue, and we have been linking the publication more tightly to the current project work that PRRAC is undertaking, and to current policy issues. Second, we are continuing to upgrade the **PRRAC website**: beginning in February of 2004, the website now incorporates an interactive, searchable database of all of the articles and resource summaries appearing in *Poverty & Race* since 1990; we have also recently added a new feature, PRRAC "Research Guides" which now accompany the substantive pages of the site, with the goal of making PRRAC a jumping off point for advocacy research on racial justice and poverty issues (five guides have been completed to date, on housing, health disparities, community organizing, women/families/children, and hunger/nutrition). We have also created specific web pages around the substantive projects in which PRRAC is engaged (such as housing mobility – see www.prrac.org/mobility).

Improving PRRAC's infrastructure

PRRAC Board development: We are in the process of actively recruiting new Board members, with a special emphasis on seeking out representatives of labor unions, faith-based organizations, journalists, and possibly, members with access to new sources of private funding. We are also seeking to continue our tradition of racial and gender diversity. The first four additions to our Board include Olati Johnson (most recently of the ACLU), Craig Fournoy (a journalism professor at SMU), Camille Holmes (of The Center for Law and Social Policy) and Rev. Darrell Armstrong (a Baptist minister from Trenton who is active in the Gamaliel network). We are also fortunate to be building on a core group of committed Board members with deep expertise in housing (Florence Roisman, Betsy Julian, Tom Henderson), education (Bill Taylor, Jack Boger), organizing (Catherine Tactaquin, Sheila Crowley, José Padilla, Tony Sarmiento), and civil rights theory (John Powell, S.M. Miller).

Strategic expansion of PRRAC's Social Science Advisory Board: We are in the process of strategically expanding PRRAC's Social Science Advisory Board to support some of the project work PRRAC is doing. Our first additions are experts in housing equity and

segregation issues: Professors Xavier de Souza Briggs (Harvard), Greg Squires (GWU), Camille Charles (Penn), John Goering (CUNY), and Margery Turner (The Urban Institute). Our next step will be to identify a similar circle of social science advisers in the area of minority health disparities.

Communications: We recognize that PRRAC has to get its message out to a broader and more diverse audience. In addition to enhancements to *Poverty and Race* and the PRRAC website, we have begun to make regular use of several broad circulation e-mail lists, including the Moving Ideas Network, the Poverty Law News, and the Leadership Conference for Civil Rights (LCCR) network. We also have begun to issue press releases to a select group of reporters who have written on poverty and race issues.

The PRRAC Grants Program: One of PRRAC's early innovations was the PRRAC grants program, which involved the disbursement and supervision of small community research grants to support advocacy-linked research on race and poverty issues. Over 10 years, the program disbursed close to 100 grants over the entire range of PRRAC issues. PRRAC staff oversaw each grant with guidance from the Board and the Social Science Advisory Board and the results were often used in local reports, lawsuits, or organizing campaigns. Many of the PRRAC-funded research projects were publicized nationally in *Poverty and Race*. The PRRAC grants program also permitted us to quickly commission social science research relating to PRRAC advocacy initiatives. The funds in the grants program are currently depleted, but we are actively seeking new sources of funding to restart this program.

Collaboration with other groups: PRRAC was created out of a desire by major civil rights groups to focus more attention on the impacts of poverty in their work – and to simultaneously bring a racial justice perspective to poverty law practitioners. This need continues, and PRRAC is now forging links with a wide variety of organizations to focus attention on policies that affect the minority poor. In this work, PRRAC retains a unique clearinghouse role, linking social science and advocacy on issues at the nexus of race and poverty, and trying to cross disciplinary lines to illuminate challenges faced by poor families. Since the beginning of this year, we have actively reached out to collaborate with a wide range of sister organizations, including the Lawyers Committee, the Urban Institute, the NAACP Legal Defense Fund, the National Council of La Raza, the Center on Budget & Policy Priorities, the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, the National Low Income Housing Coalition, the Harvard Civil Rights Project, Institutes for Race & Poverty at the University of Minnesota and Ohio State University, the Civil Rights Rollback Coalition, members of the Gamaliel Network, members of the Housing Justice Network, and many other organizations working on the state and local level.

New PRRAC advocacy, education, and policy development initiatives

Putting the *Movement Back* into Civil Rights Teaching: We are co-publishers, with Teaching for Change, of an excellent new 500+ page civil rights teaching guide, *Putting the Movement Back into Civil Rights Teaching*, which stresses the contributions of rank-and-file activists, and the relation of the Civil Rights Movement to contemporary organizing struggles. The goal is to help empower students and to connect the Movement with present day issues in their communities. The book received excellent reviews since its publication in the spring of 2004 and was awarded the Philip K. Chinn Multicultural Book Award from the National Association for Multicultural Education (NAME).

Teacher-community workshops to promote civil rights teaching in the public schools: We are now planning for a series of regional teacher/community

workshops to be facilitated by the contributing authors and editors around the country to promote stronger civil rights curricula and to help motivate teachers and students to become more connected to social movements. The first teacher-community workshop is planned for the San Francisco Bay Area in the spring of 2005.

Regional housing opportunity: Despite the renewed interest in housing desegregation in this anniversary year of *Brown v. Board of Education*, there continues to be an absence of strong national policy leadership on this issue. PRRAC is extremely well positioned to play such a role, with its important recent contributions to research on the federal role in housing segregation, a board that includes some of the most prominent national supporters of stronger fair housing enforcement, and a new Executive Director with recognized legal expertise on federal housing policy and desegregation. Beginning in 2004, we have launched several related projects that fill critical gaps in the national housing and civil rights policy and enforcement agenda:

Third National Conference on Housing Mobility: This important conference, held on December 3-4, 2004, followed two earlier conferences on Assisted Regional Housing Mobility, held in 1994 and 1997 to explore the potential of housing voucher programs that are specially designed to assist low income families move to lower poverty and less racially isolated neighborhoods. Invited participants included administrators of local housing mobility programs, public housing agency staff, housing advocates, researchers, and policymakers. The Conference included an assessment of recent social science literature on housing mobility, discussion of best practices and continuing challenges from the field, and a consensus building discussion on mobility program design and policy priorities. The December conference is part of a two-year Housing Mobility Initiative to organize and activate a broader constituency for housing mobility with the aim of protecting housing mobility in current federal programs and to fund, assess, and improve housing mobility programs around the country

Civil Rights Mandates in the Low Income Housing Tax Credit Program: The tax credit program, administered by the IRS and state Housing Finance Agencies, is currently the largest low-income housing production program in the country. Unfortunately, it is being operated with little or no civil rights oversight. Patterns of project siting and occupancy in some states are reproducing and perpetuating segregation of low-income families in high poverty neighborhoods. In other states, developments in lower poverty areas are not providing access for low-income urban families. We are working with the Lawyers Committee to provide research and technical assistance to state-based advocates who are working on this issue, we have developed and distributed an advocates' guide describing 'best and worst practices' in state tax credit plans, and we recently took the lead role in drafting comments to the IRS on behalf of 12 legal services and civil rights organizations, criticizing the lack of meaningful fair housing guidance in the draft IRS guide to be issued to state Housing Finance Agencies (see www.prrac.org/policy.php).

Baltimore Housing Opportunity Initiative: This past summer, in Baltimore, PRRAC convened a group of national experts on housing and civil rights policy to help envision a comprehensive set of housing and development policies designed to promote housing opportunity, desegregation, and equitable metropolitan growth. Baltimore presents a unique opportunity for this type of analysis, because of the pending public housing desegregation case, *Thompson v. HUD*, which will not only be a landmark case on the question of government

liability, but will also explore the limits of judicial power to fashion metropolitan desegregation remedies. Our planned efforts are independent of the lawsuit, but are designed to be helpful to the parties and to the public dialogue around these issues. The focus on new thinking on housing desegregation remedies in the context of a particular city and region is part of an emerging national policy dialogue among leading civil rights and housing policy organizations, and will include a general reassessment of the public housing desegregation settlements entered in the 1990s.

Housing and School Segregation: Government Culpability, Government Remedies: These three historical studies, originally funded by a multi-year grant from the Ford Foundation, trace the development of federal housing and transportation policies in relation to increasing housing and school segregation in American metropolitan areas. These studies take a much closer look at the early decisions and policies within the federal bureaucracy that have been broadly described in works like Douglas Massey & Nancy Denton's *American Apartheid*. The final study, by David Freund, was released in mid-2004. Entitled "Democracy's Unfinished Business: Federal Policy and the Search for Fair Housing, 1961-1968," it examines the federal government's largely unsuccessful campaign to promote "fair housing" inside HUD during the Kennedy and Johnson administrations. Freund's study follows Professor Arnold Hirsch's "The Last and Most Difficult Barrier: Segregation and Federal Housing Policy in the Eisenhower Administration, 1953-1960," and "The Interstates and the Cities: Highways, Housing, and the Freeway Revolt" by Professor Raymond Mohl. All are now available on PRRAC's website.

Educational equity: Educational equity has been a long-term focus of PRRAC's work. We are now exploring two locally-based technical assistance/organizing initiatives to improve educational prospects for low- income, minority children.

Intervening to reduce high student turnover: High rates of turnover in high-poverty schools are extremely harmful to the educational prospects for low-income children. Last fall, PRRAC generated an impressive policy report and toolkit on this issue, titled *Fragmented: Improving Education for Mobile Students*. This report is based on a conference co-sponsored by PRRAC and published in the *The Journal of Negro Education*. The report analyzes the multiple causes of high turnover – including housing instability and eviction policy – and proposes responses to reduce student turnover. We are now planning to bring the proposals outlined in this report to local school districts that are experiencing serious turnover problems. The publication of *Fragmented* follows PRRAC's widely distributed publication *Add It Up: Using Research to Improve Education for Low-Income and Minority Students* (2001).

Minority health disparities and neighborhood poverty: PRRAC is working to identify and promote advocacy initiatives in response to new research on the physical and mental health impacts of living in segregated, high-poverty neighborhoods. We are currently showcasing a series of articles in *Poverty & Race* by leading public health policy researchers, and we have developed a new Research Guide on minority health disparities on our website, www.prrac.org (health page). We are developing a best practices report on innovative local research and advocacy strategies, and it is our hope, if funds permit, to sponsor several local forums on health impacts of racial and economic segregation, in order to bring recent research on this issue to advocates. The relationship between segregation and minority health disparities was also highlighted at our Housing Mobility Conference on December 3rd and 4th.