

PRRAC

Poverty & Race Research Action Council

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THE POVERTY AND RACE RESEARCH ACTION COUNCIL 2007 ANNUAL REPORT

The Poverty & Race Research Action Council (PRRAC) is a not-for-profit civil rights policy organization based in Washington, D.C. PRRAC's primary mission is to help connect social scientists with advocates working on race and poverty issues, and to promote a research-based advocacy strategy on issues of structural racial inequality. PRRAC's current work focuses on the continuing legacy of government sponsored racial and economic segregation in the U.S., and its consequences for low income families in the areas of health, education, employment, and incarceration. Our substantive work in 2007 focused on research and advocacy in housing, education, and health. PRRAC also publishes the *Poverty & Race* newsletter, a bi-monthly clearinghouse for new research and advocacy ideas on race and poverty issues. This report will briefly describe the most significant research and advocacy initiatives undertaken by PRRAC in 2007.

HOUSING AND SEGREGATION FROM OPPORTUNITY

In our housing research and advocacy work, we try to analyze and respond to the ways in which government systems interact with the private market to promote racial segregation and concentrated poverty. Our primary focus has been on three of the largest U.S. housing programs (with the greatest potential for moving families to higher opportunity areas): the Section 8 voucher program, the Low Income Housing Tax Credit Program, and the HOPE VI public housing redevelopment program. We are also working on an innovative coalition effort in Baltimore to support a regional desegregation remedy, and we hosted a working group on housing segregation and discrimination to augment the 2008 U.S. compliance review under the U.N. Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination.

Housing Mobility Initiative: We continue to press for policy changes in the Section 8 program (our largest low income housing program) that will enhance the ability of poor families to move to communities of their choice – particularly communities with strong schools and solid employment opportunities. We were heartened to see the proposal to expand housing mobility appear in the presidential campaign, and later in the Center for American Progress report, [A National Strategy to Cut Poverty in Half](#) (now included in the “Half in Ten” coalition). Our housing mobility work in 2007 focused in two major areas:

Section 8 Voucher Reform: We prepared a detailed national consensus statement on how to restore housing mobility in the Section 8 program, entitled *The Section 8 program and access to opportunity: An agenda for policy reform*. We obtained endorsements to the statement from over 50 state and local housing fair housing organizations, and several key national civil rights organizations. The statement was formally submitted when PRRAC was invited to testify at a House Financial Services subcommittee hearing on The Section 8 Voucher Reform Act (March 9, 2007).

Connecting Families to Opportunity – a series of best practices forums: As part of our efforts to inform future housing mobility program design, we designed and sponsored a series of forums in Baltimore in 2007 with the theme of “housing mobility plus” – building on recent research suggesting that better efforts to assist families *after* they move will be the key to success in future mobility programs – and that connecting families more quickly to existing community resources will give them a stronger chance at remaining in their new community over the long term. The three convenings included:

Housing Mobility and Health: Connecting Families and Children to Improved Health Outcomes (May 22, 2007): This [forum highlighted recent research on relationship between housing, concentrated poverty and health; exploring how to better use housing mobility to improve health outcomes; approaches to help families achieve faster health gains from a mobility move; and strategies for improving access to suburban health care providers](#). The forum was extremely successful, attracting over 80 public health experts, foundation staff, housing mobility program directors, and local activists in the Baltimore area.

Effective employment counseling and placement in high opportunity communities: This July 9th [expert roundtable](#), cosponsored by The Mobility Agenda, a DC non-profit specializing in low wage work issues, [examined best practices in workforce development and related programs](#) and assess how these can be put [to use in](#) the context of [a regional mobility program](#) – including issues such as [childcare, rent incentives, and transportation assistance](#).

Mobility and education/youth development: This forum, held on December 3, 2007, explored [how to better link housing mobility and educational opportunity; improving outcomes for children and adolescents in housing mobility programs; with a special focus on problems faced by teenage boys; and highlighting the school-based intervention approach in the Dallas mobility program](#).

Source of Income Discrimination: We joined the Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights in an amicus brief in the Maryland Court of Appeals supporting Montgomery County in its defense of a Section 8 discrimination ordinance from a

series of challenges that could effect similar laws in 12 other states. The Maryland court dismissed the challenge, and a subsequent effort by landlord groups to appeal the case to the U.S. Supreme Court was also rejected.

Civil Rights Mandates in the Low Income Housing Tax Credit Program: In 2007, we continued to publicize and disseminate our two reports published in 2006, *Are States Using the Low Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) to Enable Families with Children to Live in Low Poverty and Racially Integrated Neighborhoods?* (Abt Associates, cosponsored with National Fair Housing Alliance) and *Building Opportunity: Civil Rights Best Practices in the Low Income Housing Tax Credit Program* (cosponsored with Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights). We also participated with the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities in a series of meetings with industry representatives to discuss potential reforms in advance of expected action on the LIHTC program by the House Ways & Means Committee.

Hope VI Civil Rights Task Force: In the context of Congressional consideration of HOPE VI reauthorization legislation, we recruited a broad coalition of civil rights and housing groups to develop a statement of “Civil Rights Principles” for the HOPE VI program, highlighting the need to balance rights of tenants to return to redeveloped housing communities with the parallel need to provide tenants with wider housing opportunities and to desegregate metropolitan regions. The statement has been endorsed by the NAACP Legal Defense Fund, the National Fair Housing alliance, and the Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights, and over 30 state and local groups. Building on this work, we have begun the process of establishing a “HOPE VI Civil Rights Task Force” to work with local advocates to monitor implementation of new HOPE VI developments (from a fair housing perspective) in over a dozen cities.

Community Reinvestment Act: We joined the Inclusive Communities Project in submitting formal comments on civil rights implications of new guidance by the federal banking agencies on CRA compliance.

Baltimore Regional Housing Campaign: We have continued to play an important role in the BRHC, participating in all aspects of the Coalition’s work, serving as a liaison to the *Thompson v. HUD* legal team, assisting the ACLU in their innovative client feedback/focus group/leadership development process, taking the lead in designing and staging the three expert forums on enhancing the housing mobility program (see discussion above, under “Housing Mobility Initiative”), and assisting in the design of enhancements to the *Thompson* mobility program, designed to better connect families to employment, education and health opportunities.

A Racial Analysis of Housing Cost Burdens by Region: Each year, the National Low Income Housing Coalition issues a widely publicized national report on the shortage of affordable housing, highlighting the “cost burden” – or percentage of monthly income spent on rent – by low and moderate income families in different regions of the country. In 2007, we partnered with the NLIHC research department to obtain breakdowns of this data separated out by race/ethnic status, and we published a study indicating that the high

cost burdens documented by the NLIHC are significantly more severe for African-American and Latino renters.

Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination: In 2007, PRRAC hosted a working group of U.S. civil rights and housing organizations to prepare a “shadow report” on housing segregation and discrimination for submission to the U.N. Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. The 25-member coalition met multiple times throughout 2007, and with the help of a pro bono law firm, completed a final report entitled *Residential Segregation And Housing Discrimination In The United States: Violations Of The International Convention On The Elimination Of All Forms Of Racial Discrimination*. This report was submitted to the CERD Committee in Geneva, and served as the basis for testimony by PRRAC to the CERD Committee – as well as some of the Committee’s “Concluding Observations.”

HEALTH DISPARITIES

PRRAC’s Health Disparities Initiative seeks to bring together a health systems perspective with a focus on the social and environmental determinants of health, raising up in particular the harmful effects of racial and economic segregation on health outcomes for low income families, and highlighting remedies that may be helpful to address these neighborhood based deficits.

Regional Convenings on Health Disparities: Working with the Joint Center for Political & Economic Studies and the Alliance for Healthy Homes, we cosponsored the second meeting in a series of regional gatherings of researchers and advocates working on the issue of minority health disparities. This meeting was held in June 2007 in Newark, focused on infant and maternal health. We also completed the final report from our 2006 regional meeting in New Orleans, entitled *Rebuilding a Healthy New Orleans: Final Conference Report of the New Orleans Health Disparities Initiative* (2007).

Toward a Health Mobility Policy: Building on our successful May 22, 2007 conference on housing mobility and health, we have worked with partners at the Harvard and Michigan Schools of Public Health and the leadership of the national “Medical-Legal Partnership Program” to develop a draft policy proposal to use housing mobility as a public health intervention, potentially in a separate HHS program or as part of the Medicaid waiver process. This process is continuing in 2008.

Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination: PRRAC hosted a working group of U.S. civil rights and health/environmental organizations and academics to prepare a “shadow report” on health disparities that was submitted to the U.N. CERD Committee – culminating in testimony to the Committee in Geneva and adoption of some of our findings in the final U.N. Committee report.

EDUCATION

PRRAC's past work in education has included dissemination of our publication *Fragmented: Improving Education for Mobile Students*, on high student turnover in high poverty schools, and a report and ongoing series in *Poverty & Race* on the minority achievement gap. In the past 2-3 years, we have been focusing more actively on research and advocacy relating to school desegregation initiatives (both deconcentration of poverty and reduction of racial isolation), stressing the continuing value of K-12 racial and economic school diversity as an important means to equalizing educational outcomes.

The Project Choice Campaign: In 2007, we significantly expanded our technical assistance to the interdistrict parent organizing initiative in Hartford, Connecticut in support of the regional school desegregation remedy in the 1996 *Sheff v. O'Neill* case. Much like our work in Baltimore, this Hartford project is intended to work the political space around a major desegregation lawsuit being prosecuted by the ACLU and the NAACP Legal Defense Fund. In 2007, we produced two major locally and nationally distributed reports on expansion of the interdistrict choice remedy in Hartford, and produced an excellent DVD on the experiences of alumni in the program. There are presently over 3000 city and suburban families participating in 16 interdistrict magnet schools and over 1000 city families participating in the Project Choice program. The success of the desegregation remedy in Hartford is an important example nationally to help reverse the steady erosion of support for school integration remedies.

Voluntary School Integration case: PRRAC was an active participant in the Supreme Court amicus campaign in the *Parents Involved* case, bringing together a coalition of housing groups and leading academics to submit an amicus brief of "housing scholars and research organizations" focused on the "reciprocal relationship" between housing and school segregation.

The Future of Race Conscious Remedies: We developed a detailed analysis of the Supreme Court's decision that highlighted its potential impacts in other areas – beyond education policy. Our initial written analysis focused on the decision's impact on housing policy, and our subsequent research on health and criminal justice policy suggests that the decision will have less impact in those areas than anticipated. In early 2008, we held our first forum on this issue.

PRRAC SMALL GRANTS PROGRAM

PRRAC's research/advocacy grants program was renewed for a second year by the Annie E. Casey Foundation. The basic purpose of these grants is to intentionally connect quality social science research with an identified race and poverty advocacy effort, usually on the state or local level. The 2007 grants cycle includes:

- *The Current State of Union Organizing at the Turn of the Millennium: Unionization as an Anti-Poverty Strategy and Successful Strategies for Organizing Workers of Color*
- *Indicators of School Re-Segregation in Response to United States Supreme Court Decisions Concerning Consideration of Race in School Assignment*
- *Resisting the Raids: A Community Documentation, Action Research and Advocacy Project*
- *Technology of Mobilization: political networking in middle and high school*
- *Zoning Barriers to Fair Housing & Educational Equity in Metropolitan Boston.*
- *Moving Forward: Supporting Voucher Portability in Illinois*
- *Empowering Poverty Advocates: Support for Hands-On Training for Legal Services Advocates in GIS Race Mapping*

POVERTY & RACE

We have continued to expand the circulation of *Poverty & Race*, with the current print edition going out to more than 5500 advocates, researchers, organizers, libraries, and government officials. We have also continued to expand e-mail distribution of the publication, including posting or circulation of relevant articles with sister organizations whenever possible. Some highlights of 2007 included:

- *Here Today, Gone Tomorrow: The Impact of Subprime Foreclosures on African-American and Latino Communities* by Delvin Davis (May/June 2007) – a prescient assessment of the racial impact of the foreclosure crisis.
- *Ending/Reducing Poverty: A Forum* (July/August 2007) – review and critical assessment of the Center for American Progress proposal to reduce poverty by ½ in ten years (now embodied in the “half in ten” coalition goals)
- *The Seattle/Louisville Decision and the Future of Race-Conscious Programs* (July/August 2007) – assessment of the voluntary school integration decision
- *In Search of a Just Public Housing Policy Post-Katrina* by Stacy E. Seicshnaydre (September/October 2007) – important article staking out a middle ground in the New Orleans public housing debate
- *The Social Science Evidence on the Effects of Diversity in K-12 Schools* by Roslyn Arlin Mickelson

- *Race, Poverty, and Incarceration* by Donald Braman (November/December 2007) – review of new research on debilitating economic and social effects of incarceration
- *Transportation: Regional Equity & Environmental Justice* by Karyn Rotker (September/October 2007) – case study of a model regional equity campaign in Milwaukee

As in past years, we also highlighted articles covering civil rights history or theory, including:

- *Race, Wealth and the Commons* by Dedrick Muhammad & Chuck Collins (May/June 2007)
- *The Memphis Strike: Martin Luther King's Last Campaign* by Michael Honey (March/April 2007)
- *The Missing Class: The Near Poor* by Victor Tan Chen and Katherine S. Newman (November/December 2007)

Other publications and public education activities

PRRAC publications in 2007 (in addition to *Poverty & Race*) included:

- *Rebuilding a Healthy New Orleans: Final Conference Report of the New Orleans Health Disparities Initiative* (2007);
- *Residential Segregation and Housing Discrimination in the United States* (CERD Working Group on Housing Segregation, December 2007);
- “Connecting Families to Opportunity: The Next Generation of Housing Mobility Policy,” in Brian Smedley and Alan Jenkins, eds, *All Things Being Equal: Instigating Opportunity in an Inequitable Time* (The New Press, 2007);
- “New Directions for U.S. Housing Policy: The Unmet Potential of Two Large Programs,” in *The Erosion of Rights: Declining Civil Rights Enforcement Under the Bush Administration* (Citizens Commission on Civil Rights 2007);
- *Improving and Expanding Hartford's Project Choice Program* (2007);
- *Boston's METCO Program: Lessons for the Hartford Area* (2007);
- *Forty Years of Project Concern and Project Choice* (a 30-minute DVD highlighting alumni experiences in Hartford's voluntary school integration program);

- *Unequal Health Outcomes in the United States: A Report to the U.N. Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination* (CERD Working Group on Health and Environment, Jan. 2008);
- “The Future of Race Conscious Goals in National Housing Policy,” in *Public Housing Transformation: Confronting the Legacy of Segregation* (forthcoming, Urban Institute Press, 2008).

PRRAC staff have also been active in outreach and public education activities, speaking at more than twenty conferences and events in 2007 – including the ACLU national staff conference in St. Louis; a “Roundtable on Housing Policy” convened by the MacArthur Foundation; a Congressional briefing on Katrina (based on Chester Hartman’s co-edited book, *There is No Such Thing as a Natural Disaster: Race Class and Hurricane Katrina*); a conference at the UNC Civil Rights Center on “One People, One Nation? Housing and Social Justice: The Intersection of Race, Place, and Opportunity”; a major conference on race at the Kirwan Institute in Columbus, Ohio; the Society of Planning Historians’ annual conference; and many others.

For additional information on PRRAC initiatives, see www.prrac.org (“current projects”)

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