

# PRRAC

## *Poverty & Race Research Action Council*

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### **THE POVERTY AND RACE RESEARCH ACTION COUNCIL 2008 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 2008.

#### **HOUSING AND SEGREGATION FROM OPPORTUNITY**

2008 was an extraordinarily active year for PRRAC's housing work, beginning with the culmination of PRRAC's coalition organizing on the U.N. Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD), and continuing with our key role staffing the National Commission on Fair Housing and Equal Opportunity, and finally, laying the foundation for a new coalition to take advantage of the opportunity to advance racial and economic integration in federal housing policy in the incoming Administration.

**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. Our 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* was submitted to the CERD Committee in Geneva in February 2008, and served as the basis for testimony by PRRAC to the Committee, which included several of our key points in their "Concluding Observations" to the U.S. State Department (which must be responded to before the next periodic review).

**National Commission on Fair Housing and Equal Opportunity:** PRRAC was commissioned by the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights to help staff this bipartisan commission marking the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Fair Housing Act. PRRAC took a lead

role in developing themes and witnesses for regional hearings in Chicago, Los Angeles, Boston, Houston and Atlanta, and co-authored the final report, entitled *The Future of Fair Housing* (December 2008). The Commission, was co-chaired by former HUD Secretaries Jack Kemp and Henry Cisneros and was sponsored by the Leadership Conference for Civil Rights, the NAACP Legal Defense Fund, the National Fair Housing Alliance, and the Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights.

**Civil Rights Task Force on Federal Housing Policy:** In anticipation of the new Administration, we helped bring together a coalition of civil rights and legal services lawyers and other activists to focus on the *programmatic* aspects of fair housing – the implementation of federal housing programs at HUD, Department of Treasury and other agencies. The initial meeting of this Task Force in December set out a broad-ranging agenda that includes addressing segregation incentives in the stimulus bills, and proposed reforms in every federal housing program area.

**Housing Mobility Initiative:** We worked to complete our Resource Guide, *Connecting Families to Opportunity*, on how to better connect families to opportunities in their new communities – for improved employment, educational, and health outcomes. The guide is based on three symposia on housing mobility that we co-hosted in 2007 at the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

**Civil Rights Mandates in the Low Income Housing Tax Credit Program:** We completed the 2008 edition of *Building Opportunity: Civil Rights Best Practices in the Low Income Housing Tax Credit Program*, a 50-state survey of LIHTC state plans (with the Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights), and hosted a conference in New York to plan the next phase of advocacy in this program.

**HUD transition team:** Under the auspices of both the National Commission on Fair Housing and the Leadership Conference Housing Committee, we assisted in detailed presentations to the HUD transition team for the new Administration.

**Baltimore Regional Housing Campaign:** In 2008, we assisted the coalition in developing and seeking funding for an educational support program to help children moving from high poverty Baltimore neighborhoods and schools to low poverty schools in the Baltimore suburbs. This program is scheduled to begin in 2009.

## **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.

**Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination:** Similar to the process that led to the filing of the housing segregation report to the U.N., 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 in February 2008. The report, *Unequal Health Outcomes in the United States: A Report to the U.N. Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination*, has also been widely disseminated domestically, was featured at a Congressional Briefing on minority health disparities that we co-organized, and served as a reference for the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights’ health committee’s transition recommendations to the new administration.

## **EDUCATION**

In the past 2-3 years, PRRAC has focused 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. In 2008, we expanded our work with the Sheff Movement coalition in Hartford, and hosted a conference in Tampa on combining the HOPE VI public housing program with the Magnet Schools Assistance Act.

The Sheff Movement coalition: We have continued to coordinate staff work for the Sheff Movement coalition in Hartford (organized in support of the two-way voluntary integration remedies being developed in the *Sheff v. O’Neill* school desegregation case), including focus groups to improve our public communications, screenings of our DVD “40 Years of Project Concern and Project Choice,” church-based organizing meetings, parent outreach, website development, and press work. In 2008, we also commissioned and published a new statewide poll by the UConn School of Public Policy on attitudes toward school integration – and discovered very strong public support across all demographics for voluntary school integration programs (regional magnets and urban-suburban transfer programs) that cross school district lines. We also completed work on a short promotional DVD (our second DVD) on how to set up host family programs in an interdistrict education program. Details at [www.sheffmovement.org](http://www.sheffmovement.org).

Bringing Children Together: Magnet Schools and Public Housing Redevelopment: In February 2008, PRRAC cosponsored (with the Charles Hamilton Houston Institute) a conference bringing together educators, researchers, advocates, magnet school administrators, and leading HOPE VI developers, to discuss ways to link the Magnet Schools Assistance Act and the HOPE VI Reauthorization Act that would move away from the racial isolation and poverty concentration that characterizes both programs.

## **PRRAC SMALL GRANTS PROGRAM**

PRRAC's long-running research/advocacy grants program was renewed for a third year by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, with additional support from the W.K. Kellogg 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 2008 Small Grants program were targeted, for the first time, at a specific geographic area (Seattle-King County). Specific grants in this grant cycle will be described in the 2009 Annual Report.

### ***POVERTY & RACE***

We have continued to expand the circulation of *Poverty & Race*, with the current print edition going out to more than 6000 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 2008 included:

*How Colleges and Universities Can Promote K-12 Diversity: A Modest Proposal*, by Julius Chambers, John Charles Boger, and William Tobin

*21st Century Gateways: Immigrants in Suburban American*, by Audrey Singer, Susan W. Hardwick and Caroline B. Brettell

*Renters and the Housing Credit Crisis*, by Danilo Pelletiere and Keith Wardrip

*The Kerner Commission: Remembering, Forgetting and Truth –Telling*, by Bruce R. Thomas

*A Matter of Racial Justice: The Alarming Disparities of Lead-Poisoning Rates in New York State*, by Michael L. Hanley

*Integration and Housing Choice: a Dialogue* (symposium issue)

*Tensions Among Minority Groups?* (symposium issue)

*Native Americans and Alaska Natives: The Forgotten Minority* (symposium issue)

### **Other publications and public education activities**

PRRAC publications in 2008 (in addition to *Poverty & Race*) included:

- *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)

- *Organizing to Address Minority Health Disparities: A Directory of State and Local Initiatives* (2008 edition)
- “The Future of Race Conscious Goals in National Housing Policy,” in *Public Housing Transformation: Confronting the Legacy of Segregation* (Urban Institute Press).
- *Residential Segregation and Housing Discrimination in the United States* (CERD Working Group on Housing Segregation).
- 2008 edition of *Building Opportunity: Civil Rights Best Practices in the Low Income Housing Tax Credit Program*, a 50-state survey of LIHTC state plans (with the Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights).
- *Bringing Children Together: Magnet Schools and Public Housing Redevelopment* (with the Charles Hamilton Houston Institute) (January 2009)

PRRAC staff have also been active in outreach and public education activities, speaking at more than thirty conferences and events in 2008 – including conferences at the Free University of Berlin, the UMass-Boston College of Public & Community Service, Hofstra University, the University of Illinois-Chicago, John Marshall Law School, University of Baltimore, the annual HUD Fair Housing Conference in Atlanta, the annual ABA Affordable Housing Conference, Marquette University, and Harvard University.

In October, PRRAC celebrated its 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary with a reception at the Busboys and Poets restaurant. Special awards were presented by the Board to one of our longtime founding Board members, Florence Roisman, and to Jim Gibson, whose strong support at the Rockefeller Foundation in the late 1980s gave PRRAC its start.

*For additional information on PRRAC initiatives, see [www.prrac.org](http://www.prrac.org) (“current projects”)*

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