

# PRRAC

## *Poverty & Race Research Action Council*

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### **THE POVERTY AND RACE RESEARCH ACTION COUNCIL 2009 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 2009.

#### **HOUSING OPPORTUNITY**

**Civil Rights Task Force on Federal Housing Policy:** Following our successful June 2009 conference at the Urban Institute, we continued to press HUD on its civil rights agenda, with detailed written analyses of key HUD programs and meetings with HUD Deputy Secretary Ron Sims and his staff, HUD Assistant Secretary John Trasvina and his staff, and other members of HUD's leadership team. We also provided detailed input to HUD on the following programs:

We testified at a public "Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing Listening Session" organized by HUD FHEO to develop a new fair housing regulation – and we also submitted formal comments on the upcoming regulation.

We submitted, with our coalition partners, civil rights comments to HUD on their draft legislation for the "Choice Neighborhoods" program.

We helped compile a detailed memo to HUD leadership entitled "Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing in HUD's Affordable Housing Programs," which highlights the ways in which HUD policy impedes affordable housing development in low poverty areas.

We submitted, in collaboration with the Urban Institute, comments to the Assistant HUD Secretary for Policy Development and Research (on HUD's civil rights research agenda)

We submitted comments to Dr. Xavier Briggs, Associate Director for General Government Programs at the White House Office of Management and Budget, on the need for stronger voucher mobility requirements in the 2011 HUD budget.

We participated in an all day HUD session on Section 8 voucher reform, and a smaller policy meeting at HUD on reform of voucher rent structures.

We participated in additional planning/consultative sessions with HUD staff on the development of “subregional fair market rents” in the Section 8 program (designed to expand voucher access to higher opportunity communities).

We also participated in a series of advocacy meetings with HUD officials on the Transforming Rental Assistance proposal, the HUD strategic plan, the planned Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing Regulation, the Sustainable Communities Initiative, and fair housing enforcement.

We joined an amicus brief in the 5<sup>th</sup> Circuit, in *NAACP v. City of Kyle*, a case co-filed by the Homebuilders Association challenging exclusionary zoning in a Texas town. The case is significant because of the dangerous re-interpretation of the standard of proof in discriminatory impact cases that is advanced by the district court’s opinion.

**Housing Mobility Initiative:** On October 30th, PRRAC and the Baltimore Regional Housing Campaign welcomed many of our Baltimore area partners to the launch of our new progress report on the Baltimore Housing Mobility Program, entitled New Homes, New Neighborhoods, New Schools. The lunch forum, at the Annie E. Casey Foundation, drew about 80 participants, and included presentations on the new report by Phil Tegeler and Peter Rosenblatt (a Johns Hopkins researcher), reactions by Terreal Grant and Iris Bradford (both mobility program participants), and policy commentary by Barbara Sard, special assistant to HUD Secretary Donovan, and Danielle Bastarache, Director of the Housing Choice Voucher Program at HUD.

**Building One America conference (September 2009):** We were founding and contributing sponsors to this important conference, which mobilized a significant number of Gamaliel-supported faith based organizing networks around a regional housing opportunity theme. Here is David Rusk’s summary of the conference:

Over 425 grassroots delegates mobilized on Thursday and Friday, September 17-18 at Lincoln Park United Methodist Church (13 blocks from the Capitol) for Building One America: a National Summit on Regional Opportunity. They came from 18 states and the District of Columbia with the largest delegations representing New Jersey, Maryland, Ohio, and Pennsylvania. They assembled to give witness to their commitment to building racially and economically integrated, environmentally sustainable communities by securing progressive federal and state policies. Supporting a balanced program of revitalizing central

cities, stabilizing older suburbs, and diversifying newer suburbs, Building One America has targeted for immediate action:

- reauthorizing the Surface Transportation Act, including provisions mandating “fair growth,” MPO reform, and workforce development;
- shaping a Sustainable, *Inclusive* Communities Initiative;
- reforming Section 8 housing vouchers, Low Income Housing Tax Credits, and public housing to emphasize opportunity-based housing; and
- earmarking federal funds specifically to support integrated schools.

Thursday afternoon the delegates heard stirring remarks from Presidential Assistant Valerie Jarrett, Congressmen Earl Blumenauer (Oregon) and Rush Holt (New Jersey), HUD Assistant Secretary John Trasviña and a panel of local elected officials and grassroots leaders. For the public meeting Thursday night the audience in the church sanctuary swelled to over 600 (with an overflow crowd of 75 viewing a simulcast in the church’s Fellowship Hall) as HUD Deputy Secretary Ron Sims and Youngstown Mayor Jay Williams eloquently outlined their vision of One America. Friday morning, after a rousing send-off by Congressman Elijah Cummings (MD), delegates made over fifty Congressional visits, setting up Building One America events in their states this spring.

**The Future of Fair Credit - A Policy-Building Meeting:** We assisted the Kirwan Institute in organizing this roundtable conference on Wednesday, November 18 at the National Council of La Raza. The roundtable was a culmination of regional meetings hosted by the Kirwan Institute in five cities. It was co-sponsored by several national groups working on fair credit issues and drew about 40 experts and advocates. The agenda included discussion of racial justice implications of the Home Affordable Mortgage Program; the Neighborhood Stabilization Program; the Community Reinvestment Act; the Consumer Financial Protection Agency Act; and future directions for regulation of credit card interest and fees; bank overdraft fees; the remittance market; and credit scoring generally.

## **EDUCATIONAL EQUITY**

**National Coalition on School Diversity:** We helped to bring together at least a dozen research and advocacy groups that have been active on school integration issues to focus specifically on the U.S. Department of Education’s programmatic and funding role in promoting K-12 school integration. Recent activities of the coalition have included:

Introductory meeting with the USDOE Assistant Secretaries for Civil Rights and for Policy on the Coalition’s priorities;

Preparation of detailed comments on the failure of the new “Race to the Top” competitive funding grant program to promote integration;

“Reaffirming the Role of School Integration in K-12 Education Policy”: This conference, held at the Howard University School of Law on Friday, November 13, 2009 attracted over 300 participants, including representatives of the US Department of Education, HUD, Congressional staff, and the White House;

Development of the coalition’s “Post Conference Statement,” detailing the steps the US Department of Education must take to promote school diversity across all of its K-12 programs;

Formal comments on draft USDOE guidelines for the “Investing in Innovation Fund” issued pursuant to the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009

Addressing school based poverty concentration: We completed an initial legal and factual analysis of the potential for a state constitutionally based “poverty concentration” claim in four states: Delaware, Maryland, Wisconsin, and New Mexico.

**Sheff Movement Coalition:** We worked closely with this interdistrict parent coalition in Hartford, helping organize press conferences and letter-writing campaigns through an extremely difficult budget season, to help secure adequate funding for the continued expansion of Connecticut’s interdistrict school integration programs.

The Sheff Movement coalition in Hartford also held meetings with state education officials and with the Hartford superintendent to build support for new incentives in the interdistrict choice program – and participated in a “Building One America-Connecticut” conference, which included John Brittain as a guest speaker.

**Housing Mobility and Education:** We launched our housing mobility and education support program in Baltimore, working with two education consultants funded through a small grant from the Krieger Fund. The consultants are helping to design materials and train staff at the housing mobility program to work with families on educational adjustment issues, with the goal of helping low income families make strong educational choices for their children, and maintain their children in a stable educational placement over time.

## **CERD AND THE UPR**

In 2009, we built on our prior work (in 2007-08) with the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD), by participating in the November fact-finding visit to the US of the “UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Adequate Housing.” In December, we presented written testimony on US CERD compliance to the Human Rights and the Law Subcommittee of the Senate Judiciary Committee – in what was apparently the first-ever Senate hearing on US compliance with the human treaties it has ratified (!).

We have also begun participating in a broad NGO effort to bring domestic civil rights concerns to the attention of the UN Human Rights Council, which conducts an overall

review this year (a process known as the “Universal Periodic Review”) of US compliance with all of its human rights treaty obligations (including CERD). PRRAC is primarily working on the NGO submissions on education and health.

## **HEALTH DISPARITIES**

We have continued to develop our detailed health mobility policy proposal, and have begun to circulate drafts for review and have presented the research at several public health and housing conferences.

## **OTHER PUBLIC EDUCATION WORK**

Our flagship bimonthly publication, *Poverty & Race* has continued to expand both its audience and its subject matter coverage, with over 6000 regular recipients, and additional email coverage.

In addition to our widely circulated new reports on housing mobility and sustainable communities (referenced above), PRRAC staff was actively engaged in public education as featured speakers at a wide range of civil rights, housing and education conferences, including:

- A Department of Justice conference celebrating the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Title VI
- The annual Magnet Schools of America conference in Washington, DC.
- A fair housing training conference at the John Marshall Law School in Chicago
- The annual conference of the Connecticut Housing Coalition
- A “The Right to Housing” event at the Manilatown Center in San Francisco
- The annual convention of the National Legal Aid and Defender Association (NLADA)
- The Office of Fair Housing and Equal Opportunity at HUD
- Kirwan Institute’s “Transforming Race” conference on the health impacts of housing programs
- A symposium at the Northeastern University School of Public Health in Boston
- The 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary Critical Race Theory conference at the UCLA law school
- The Housing Justice Network national conference
- A Univ of Illinois-Chicago conference on “affirmatively furthering fair housing”
- A joint national conference of the Planners Network, Architects and Planners for Social Responsibility, and the Association of Community Development

Our Research Director Chester Hartman has also recently published: “Lessons from Katrina: Structural Racism as a Recipe for Disaster” (with Greg Squires), in Roger A. Clay, Jr. and Susan R. Jones (eds.), *Building Healthy Communities: A Guide to Community Economic Development for Advocates, Lawyers, and Policymakers* (Chicago: ABA Publishing, 2009); and “Homelessness and Student Learning,” in *Communities and Banking* (Fed. Reserve Bank of Boston, Fall 2009). Executive Director Phil Tegeler published a chapter in *Public Housing Transformation: Confronting the Legacy of*

*Segregation* (The Urban Institute Press, 2009), titled “The Future of Race Conscious Goals in National Housing Policy.”