

# Research and Advocacy Group Established

**Chester Hartman**

How can social science research aid advocacy efforts to address the intersection of race and poverty? How can researchers and activists in this area begin to network with each other on a regular basis to exchange information and develop strategies?

A new organization, the Poverty & Race Research Action Council (PRRAC), has been convened by major civil rights, civil liberties and anti-poverty groups, to address these questions. With substantial initial support from the Rockefeller Foundation, funds will be channeled into research grants tied to local, state and national level advocacy strategies for litigation, legislation, community organizing, public education and other activities that support progressive social change.

PRRAC will also establish a communications network among advocates and social science researchers. It will hold conferences, publish reports and disseminate ideas and materials.

PRRAC's first grant awards represent a cross section of issues, players and remedies sought for persistent race and poverty problems. Here are some examples:

- Legal Services of New York, among other organizations, has brought suit claiming that the consequences of eviction for low-income New Yorkers are so severe, frequently including homelessness, that court-appointed free attorney services should be available. The PRRAC grant will enable completion of research on the outcome of eviction proceedings in which tenants have and have not been represented, and on the projected costs of establishing a right to counsel in such cases.
- Project BASIC, a low-income, minority, statewide advocacy organization in Rhode Island, and Rhode Island Legal Services have brought suit to require that replacement housing for public housing units demolished by the Providence Housing Authority meet Fair Housing Act and Civil Rights Act standards. PRRAC funding will

enable researchers to document the failure of the housing authority and HUD in meeting these statutory requirements and to propose remedies. The resulting litigation and supporting research will be of use in other cities where public housing projects are being replaced.

- High growth rates in California have exacerbated housing affordability for low-income residents, who are primarily racial minorities. PRRAC funds will enable the Coalition for Rural Housing Project to document these trends, develop affordability indices, and work toward a series of legislative remedies, as well as undertake public education and organizing. This model will be useful in other states experiencing similar trends.
- Evidence exists that homeless children in Chicago are not receiving an adequate education, as required under the McKinney Act. PRRAC will fund research to document this failure, in order to assist the Legal Assistance Foundation in preparing a lawsuit. The resulting research, litigation and public education is intended for use as a model for other cities where similar violations of McKinney Act requirements exist.

Funding proposals for advocacy-oriented research will be sought from advocacy groups with the capacity to undertake the research themselves, from advocacy-researcher teams, and from researchers linked to advocacy groups. For those cases in which groups do not have a research capacity or cannot find an appropriate researcher, PRRAC will serve in a brokerage capacity, introducing groups to progressive academics and others who have the capacity to assist them.

While housing will be the PRRAC's initial focus, other areas will be incorporated and funded as well. The next areas of concentration will likely be education and health. Projects that cross subject-area boundaries are especially welcome.

PRRAC's long-range goals are to influence the social science field to produce more relevant research of use to advocacy groups and to influence the agenda of advocacy groups through exposure to the results of relevant research.

To add your name to the mailing list, receive a brochure, or apply for funding, contact Chester Hartman at PRRAC, 1875 Connecticut Avenue NW, Suite 714, Washington DC 20009, (202) 387-9887. □

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