The New Racism

A Talk with PRA Director Tarso Luís Ramos

PRAccess: So you’ve been here almost a year. What do you think about your new professional home?

It is very rewarding to work with such an accomplished research team. Collectively, we must have a half century or more of experience studying right-wing leaders, social movements and political projects. Given the gravity of the issues on which we work, it’s a relief to discover that everyone has a pretty developed sense of humor.

The breadth of PRA’s mission is sometimes daunting. Staying current on developments across multiple sectors of the Right while also deepening my historical knowledge beyond current areas of expertise is a definite challenge. You pick up a lot in the normal course of a day, but I could spend a month in our library without making it through more than a small fraction of our collection.

What excites me most is developing tools that are useful to social justice organizations, be they in-depth research reports, fact sheets or workshops. I look forward to collaborating with many more of our movement allies in shaping this work.

PRAccess: Last May, after seeing the spring demonstrations, you were optimistic about the possibilities for an effective immigrant rights social movement in the U.S. Do you have any thoughts now on ways groups could sustain that movement?

You couldn’t help but feel inspired by the millions of immigrants who withheld their labor and took to the streets to protest their economic exploitation and efforts to criminalize their lives — as seen in the Sensenbrenner immigration bill (HR4437).

We saw that the May Day mobilizations were for the most part organized independently of the immigrant rights groups and networks usually at the forefront of the struggle — a situation as exciting as it was surprising.

Despite a strong Latino backlash against Republicans in the midterm elections, chances of truly progressive immigration reform from this Democratic Congress are not good. I think that the most progressive wings of the movement view this as a longer struggle and are prioritizing the building of grassroots infrastructure. A pattern of large, high-profile worksite raids by federal immigration agents has recently emerged as a threat and organizing opportunity — at least in local areas. Such episodes expose the contradictions and brutal inhumanity of our immigration and economic policies.

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Interview with Tarso Luís Ramos continued from page 1

PRAccess: What do you think of the growing movement among progressives for Black-Brown dialogues on race?

I’ve participated in a couple of these dialogues and have a lot of thoughts! The U.S. racial caste system is experiencing significant shifts that warrant our close attention and discussion. I think the impulse for dialogue is a positive one, but there is also some danger of substituting an over-simplified Black/Latino/White racial paradigm for the still-dominant Black/White one. The model minority image tends to eclipse the reality of poor and marginalized Cambodian, Filipino and other “Asians” — a racial category at least as diverse as “Latino.” Indigenous communities, whether from within the U.S.’s borders or beyond, are often overlooked in the “Black/Brown” frame — even when members of these communities are regarded as “Latinos.”

The phrase “Black/Brown” may also belie a tendency to conflate skin color with culture and history. Where do Afro-Latinos, for instance, fit in this equation? There are of course legitimate concerns that some African-Americans have and will throw their support behind anti-immigrant policies, and that some Latinos have and will exploit the potential political clout of their fast-growing communities at the expense of African-Americans. These questions demand discussion, but not to the exclusion of considering larger complex issues such as how white economic and political dominance is changing to adapt and thrive in a more multiracial United States.

PRAccess: Can you tell me a bit about your research on the “new racism” and the Right’s colorblind ideology?

Colorblind — or, as some call it, “power evasive” — racism is arguably the hegemonic racial ideology of the post-Civil Rights period in the United States, which is to say that its influence extends well beyond the organized Right Wing. Among its core tenets is belief in the diminishing salience of race — a belief that makes the perpetuation of stark racial inequalities more rather than less likely. When pressed, adherents often acknowledge, and even decry, harmful racial disparities but ultimately oppose most or all policy interventions to reduce them. But they justify their opposition not with “old racist” rationales such as biological inferiority. Rather, this kinder, gentler racism argues (sometimes apologetically) that underprivileged communities of color are responsible for their own lot with “new racism” arguments, such as the cultural pathology thesis developed in neoconservative Daniel Patrick Moynihan’s famous 1965 report, *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action*. Eduardo Bonilla-Silva’s *Race Without Racists* provides an excellent dissection of “colorblind” ideology. I’m interested in exposing how this now “common sense” set of ideas facilitates specific right-wing initiatives on race and serves as a fundamental obstacle to racial progress.

PRAccess: PRA is increasingly using new technology to deliver research information to our constituents in accessible formats. What are some of the new technology initiatives at PRA?

Organizers and advocates working in PRA’s priority areas of racial justice, LGBT equity, reproductive justice, civil liberties, and economic justice will soon find new and expanded resources on our website. We now release many of our new reports as PDF files that can be downloaded directly from www.publiceye.org, and we’re looking at doing the same with some of our back catalog of reports and perhaps even a few of our books. Our senior analyst, Chip Berlet, is a part-time denizen of the blogosphere and contributes regularly at *Talk2Action*, the leading blog site on the Christian Right. Through a new partnership with National Radio Project’s *Making Contact* program, *Public Eye* editor Abby Scher is producing half-hour audio documentaries for syndicated broadcast and webcast. And that’s just some of what we’re doing. Stay tuned.

PRA Bids Farewell to Tom!

Tom Louie, who has led Political Research Associates’ communications and fundraising department for four years, is leaving us. Tom brought his experience in immigrant rights nonprofits and as a leader of the Progressive Communicator’s Network to his work here, showing off his ability to keep a lot of balls in the air at the same time. Among his accomplishments were editing this newsletter, building general appeal income, and organizing events around the country in celebration of our 25th anniversary (see p. 4).

Tom also launched the Jean Hardisty Legacy Fund, which raised over $105,000 in its first year. He put his talents to work in promoting PRA’s Activist Resource Kits, *Defending Justice* (about prisons) and *Defending Immigrant Rights*, which organizers relied upon at major trainings.

Tom is a generous colleague who, no matter how harried, always managed to help when a desperate coworker called! He will be missed.

— Abby Scher, Public Eye Senior Editor
On November 2, PRA Executive Director Katherine Ragsdale shared her insights on faith, choice, and religious freedom at a forum sponsored by the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, the American Constitution Society, and the Federalist Society on an upcoming Supreme Court abortion debate. The forum, held at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C., was covered live by CSPAN and picked up by over 70 other outlets.

Before the December release of our Undoing Reproductive Freedom report on the growing lobbying of Christian Right groups at the United Nations, PRA researcher Pam Chamberlain conducted workshops on the topic at the National Coalition to Support Sexuality Education in New York City and at the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force’s Creating Change Conference. Her research, highlighting the growing effort of conservative NGOs promoting their anti-abortion, anti-contraception agenda at the United Nations, received broad media attention, including: townhall.com,.opendemocracy.net, WBAI in New York, and Danish National Radio.

In January, Research Director Tarso Luis Ramos was one of 20 national mentors at the third annual Young People For National Summit for Progressive Leaders and Activists in Washington, D.C. The summit brought together 180 student leaders from across the country for learning and strategizing on ways to enhance their collective social justice work in 2007.

In March, Pam Chamberlain and Tarso Ramos presented a workshop on “Right Wing Intersections: Race, Gender and Sexuality” at the Facing Race conference sponsored by the Applied Research Center in New York City.

On March 30, Researchers Chip Berlet and Pam Chamberlain presented some of PRA’s most popular workshops at the Hampshire College Reproductive Rights Conference. Chip was a panelist in the opening plenary, “Resisting the Right,” and Chip and Pam later presented PRA’s “How the Right Took Power” workshop twice to accommodate the demand at the conference.

Just in time for tax day! Public Eye Editor Abby Scher reported on the Christian Right’s growing effort to dismantle the progressive tax system for the half-hour, nationally syndicated radio show Making Contact. The in-depth report built on the investigation of Rich Meagher published in the Winter 2005 Public Eye called “Tax Revolt as a Family Value: How the Christian Right is Becoming a Free Market Champion.”

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“On immigrant rights, we have to build more bridges with African Americans and others, so that we can move forward together.”
INHE CHOI, BOARD MEMBER OF NATIONAL KOREAN AMERICAN SERVICES AND EDUCATION CONSORTIUM, AND CO-CHAIR OF THE CHICAGO CELEBRATION.

“Twelve years of cogent, timely research and analysis — what an achievement! The broad community of social justice activists and organizations looks forward to many more years of effective organizing and advocacy informed by PRA’s indispensable work.”
EVENT CO-CHAIR LINDA BURNHAM, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF WOMEN OF COLOR RESOURCE CENTER AT THE BAY AREA CELEBRATION.

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“We need government involvement in upholding public morality and for government to stay out of our private lives.”
MASSACHUSETTS REPRESENTATIVE BARNEY FRANK SPEAKING AT THE MAY D.C. CELEBRATION

“If we keep our expectations realistic, do some serious movement-building, and let the young lead, the progressive movement can begin to make some real progress.”
JEAN HARDISTY, PRA FOUNDER/ PRESIDENT EMERITA AT THE NOVEMBER CHICAGO CELEBRATION.

“Twenty-five years of cogent, timely research and analysis — what an achievement! The broad community of social justice activists and organizations looks forward to many more years of effective organizing and advocacy informed by PRA’s indispensable work.”
EVENT CO-CHAIR LINDA BURNHAM, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF WOMEN OF COLOR RESOURCE CENTER AT THE BAY AREA CELEBRATION.

Denver event Co-Chair Lynda Goldstein and PRA ED Katherine Ragsdale at the September celebration hosted by Lynda.

PRA founder Jean Hardisty and Connie Hall at the November celebration in Chicago.

PRA Research Director Tarsco Luis Ramos and Ludovic Blain from the New Progressive Coalition at the November New York celebration.

Event Co-Chair Inhe Choi and Jean Carter Hill from “Imagine Englewood II” at the November Chicago celebration.
PRA Welcomes Our New Board Members

Richard A. Gross is the Manager of BW Realty Advisors LLC in Washington, D.C. He is a board member of NARAL Pro-Choice America and NARAL Pro-Choice America Foundation. Formerly a lawyer in private practice, he also has managed state and federal consumer protection agencies and commissions.

Supriya Pillai is the Program Officer for Asia at the International Women’s Health Coalition, where she works with local partners in Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and Turkey to advance sexual and reproductive health and rights. Ms. Pillai also worked with Population Services International in Cambodia, where she led the organization’s introduction of contraceptives. She’s currently on the board of the Third Wave Foundation.

The Reverend Carlton W. Veazey is President and CEO of the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice and founder of their National Black Church Initiative. He is also a minister of the National Baptist Convention U.S.A., considered the world’s largest Black organization, and was formerly chair of their Theological Commission. Rev. Veazey has received awards such as the Gloria Steinem Award and, in 2005, was named one of “21 Leaders for the 21st Century” by Women’s E-News—the only man so honored.

Alea Woodlee serves as the Associate Director of the Funders’ Collaborative on Youth Organizing (FCYO), an organization dedicated to youth development and social justice. A long-time activist, Alea formerly served as the Executive Director of the Pro-Choice Public Education Project. She currently serves on the board of the Reproductive Health Technologies Project, and is board chair of The Laundromat Project, a social justice arts organization.

Coming up in The Public Eye

• The world of gay conservatives.
• Right-wing anti-labor front groups: their lineage and funders.
• The Christian Right’s attack on mainline Protestant dominations.
• The myth of Latinos’ “ethnic cleansing” of blacks in LA.

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FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

this, our Office Manager, Cindy King, will be on her way out the door as, on June 30th, she marries (yay, Massachusetts) and moves to Florida. Busy and productive. Our research and communications staff continue to produce and disseminate top notch reports, articles, presentations, and speeches. Journalists and students continue to call to pick our brains or visit to use our library. We continue to reach out to our allies to build coalitions that will insure that the work we produce is the work the folks in the field need. And we continue to develop new ways to make that work accessible to a variety of audiences with a variety of needs and resources. The Public Eye benefits from close cooperation and coordination between our research and editorial teams. Our web site is being re-worked to make it intuitively accessible to people with varying levels of expertise in the field. Scholars and other “deep” users will still be able to drill down to access all our reports but casual users and novices will benefit from a home page that highlights current news, events, and issues of interest. Browsers will easily find pages dedicated to each of our issue areas — reproductive and LGBTQ justice, racial and economic justice, and civil liberties, with special attention to the Christian Right. And we’re experimenting with radio production, podcasting, distance learning opportunities and other ways to expand and diversify our reach.

We’re also building the internal systems that will enhance our work and our outreach. From the website to the database, from accounting systems to cataloging systems, from work teams to development planning, we’re building the infrastructure that will support PRA’s work into its next quarter-century. And you, our friends, colleagues, and supporters, have been, and continue to be, essential to all of this work. Your financial support (our 2007 end of year appeal broke all our past records — thank you), your advice and collegiality, your friendship and moral support, they all are essential to what we do and who we are. Thank you for sharing with us in this work.

Katherine Ragsdale
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For information on additional materials available from PRA, please visit our website: www.publiceye.org and order on-line.

Item on PRA wish list: a SVGA image projector for computer presentations