Staff in Action—PRA's Wide Reach

Fifteen Years and Counting

PRA has been a regular presence at the Hampshire College Civil Liberties and Public Policy Program annual conference since it was instituted in 1993. This year’s two-day gathering, “From Abortion Rights to Social Justice,” was free, as always, and attracted more than 1,100 reproductive justice advocates from around the country. Chip Berlet summarized “2000 years of conservative thought;” Tarso Luis Ramos spoke on “Resisting the Right;” and Pam presented a “How the Right Took Power” slideshow, so popular in the past that it was offered twice at this year’s conference. A total of 200 participants attended the PRA presentations.

Clergy for Reproductive Rights

In January, at the invitation of Concerned Clergy for Choice, a network of 1,000 clergy in New York State affiliated with the Education Fund of Family Planning Advocates of New York State, Pam Chamberlain conducted a phone seminar on “What’s Next for the Religious Right? New Faces, New Tactics,” facilitated by Rabbi Dennis Ross. In discussing the continuing political power of conservative evangelicals, Pam explained how the Institute for Religion and Democracy targets mainline Christian denominations with divisive tactics to challenge their social gospel and diminish their progressive influence.

Creating Change Leaders

Pam presented at the annual National Gay and Lesbian Task Force “Creating Change” conference held in Detroit in February. She led an interactive workshop with 50+ participants on “How to Respond to the Right,” which included sharing examples of anti-LGBT activities in their communities and role playing around specific contexts and sound bites. Pam also organized a caucus of researchers and analysts (mostly students and faculty doing graduate research), which proved useful for exchanging ideas and for organizations to find newly minted researchers to work on their projects.

Hot Debate at Immigrant and Refugee Rights Conference

In the wake of the collapse of federal immigration reform and as anti-immigrant activity escalates in communities across the United States, 600 immigrant rights activists and organizers came together in Houston in January 2008 to take stock and consider strategic options. The National Conference for Immigrant and Refugee Rights featured nearly 70 workshops on topics ranging from former New York Governor Elliot Spitzer’s ill-fated driver’s license initiative to the role of faith-based groups in the immigration rights movement.

FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Dear Friends of PRA:
Welcome to PRAccess, our newsletter for friends and supporters. We have much news to share with you. Here you’ll find an expanded Staff in Action article describing various PRA presentations, PRA in the Public Eye, with recent media mentions; important additions to our staff; and more. First, though, I’d like to take a minute to share some exciting new developments.

New Foundation Partnerships
The end of 2007 brought us a torrent of good news and opportunities. Several PRA initiatives have received very promising foundation interest, and two foundations and one organization came to PRA because of our expertise and reputation—to request proposals for exciting work that fits nicely with our mission.

Right Web
Our new Right Web project, which tracks militaristic foreign policy advocates, including neoconservatives, was launched earlier this year. PRA was invited to take over this working project from the International Relations Center (IRC), which recently closed its doors. Right Web came to us with 2008 funding and the two consultants who have led Right Web for years. The Right Web homepage is http://rightweb.irc-online.org.

U.S. Right’s Support for Anti-LGBTQ Leaders at Home and Abroad
This project was proposed by a foundation that has provided general support funding for PRA’s LGBTQ work for many years. Now funded, this new project will explore how the U.S. Right is crippling the progressive work of mainline Protestant denominations on LGBTQ justice in the U.S. and overseas. Foundation funding includes support for a project director and at

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license policies, to the wall being expanded along the U.S. southern land border, to the relationship between reproductive justice and immigrant rights.

Tarso Luís Ramos spoke before a large group considering next steps forward on federal immigration reform. In assessing the current political climate, Tarso identified trends requiring close attention by the movement.

- Further militarization of the immigration issue is occurring in the context of a resurgent national security state that affects both immigrant and non-immigrant communities. The Iraq War will inevitably produce new domestic policing techniques and, with returning veterans and contractors, new security personnel who will apply their war training to immigration enforcement.

- Economic recession—national and global—may swell the U.S.-bound migrant stream and the ranks of the nativist anti-immigrant backlash. If only for political cover, the anti-immigrant movement seeks to broaden its appeal beyond whites. The racial profiling of African-Americans and Latinos for predatory subprime loans, foreclosure, and recession will significantly affect these communities and could create a climate favorable to their recruitment.

- While nativist backlash defends white racial privilege during other periods of rapid demographic and economic change, today’s backlash comes in the post-civil rights period in which “colorblind” (power-evasive) racial ideology has become widely influential. In this context, even white nationalists often deny any racial animus, and the colorblind crowd can sound deceptively liberal. We have not adequately adapted to this new social and discursive reality.

- Our opposition is not a monolith. Various factions of the anti-immigrant movement seek different national policies on immigration and national security. Yet the racism of many prominent anti-immigrant organizations and leaders makes them vulnerable.

Several front-burner issues emerged that were hotly debated during the conference, including:

- the prospects for any meaningful federal immigration reform over the next number of years, regardless of which party controls the White House;

- the importance of promoting a progressive federal immigration reform alternative to corporate and/or xenophobic proposals now dominating debate on both sides of the aisle in Congress; and

- the question of whether and how to increase the militancy of the immigrant rights movement’s tactics (e.g., organized civil disobedience among citizens and non-citizens alike) to better counter escalating attacks on immigrants across the country.

PRA at the Left Forum

Not surprisingly, PRA panelists’ answer to the question, “Is the Christian Right Dead?” was “No!” Chip Berlet and Tarso Luís Ramos talked about why to an overflow crowd at a panel at the New York City Left Forum’s annual gathering in March.

The audience learned from Chip and Tarso that: no abortion services are available in 87 percent of U.S. counties; federally funded religious charities can legally discriminate in hiring and service provision on the basis of religion, and the feds are funding groups they should assume will discriminate on the basis of

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PRA Salon Series

The Right and Liberal Philanthropy

Air America radio host Laura Flanders shared her research on the effects of right-wing electoral and policy successes on progressive philanthropy at PRA’s March Salon. The 9/11 terror attacks, U.S. invasion of Iraq, and the election of George W. Bush to a second term in 2004 convinced some liberal and progressive business people to apply their corporate savvy to social change philanthropy. Upset at the seeming incompetence of liberal campaigns, a group Flanders calls “philanthro-capitalists” encouraged progressive groups to “Narrow your agenda, cut out any extraneous work that you can’t put a financial value on, [such as leadership development], and by all means, don’t make too much of a ruckus, because we want you to demonstrate your worth through both your impact and your standing in society.”

Flanders, who dedicates a chapter of her recent book, *Blue Grit*, to the topic, argues that such “metrics”-focused philanthropy is also influencing foundation giving. Ironically, she adds, the business people behind this trend, which includes the Democracy Alliance, would likely follow “the exact opposite” of their own advice. In times of crisis, like the present, such businesses “reconnect with their customers, prioritize their closest customer base, and lobby and advocate together through alliances that lift up their success stories.”

Who are the winners and losers? Just as the wealth gap between the rich and everyone else is increasing, Flanders argues that there is a growing divide between the national liberal organizations she calls “shadow Party groups” and the grassroots progressive movement. On the chopping block: “People-of-color-led and poor-people-led organizations, groups that work in and are of the grassroots.”

Flanders noted that “philanthro-capitalists” have studied the Right more than they have the progressive movement, and as they search for a “silver bullet” they cast aside much of the work that builds progressive power. “The belief in the silver bullet is as American as apple pie or snake oil,” said Flanders.

A video of Flanders’ talk can be found at www.youtube.com/prapubliceye. For information about forthcoming salons or to download audio from our previous Salons, visit www.publiceye.org.
sexual orientation; and the Christian Right has built an enormous infrastructure of institutions that won’t disappear—even if pundits say electoral setbacks show that it is in decline.

The old guard is dying and retiring, it’s true, said Rich Meagher, Mount professor and writer for The Public Eye. “But, who will replace Phyllis Schlafly?” Michelle Goldberg, Salon and Public Eye contributor, responded “We are seeing a changing of the guard already, with Pastor Hagee rising in prominence with his endorsement of Senator John McCain and James Dobson of Focus on the Family losing power as he refuses to play with the almost-certain Republican presidential nominee,” Goldberg mentioned televangelist Rod Parsley and former Arkansas governor and presidential hopeful Mike Huckabee as intriguing leaders on the horizon.

“The Christian Right’s base has pushed their reluctant leadership to get on board with anti-immigrant politics,” Tarso noted. Nativism flows through the Christian Right, particularly through its belief that the country was founded as a Christian nation and that it must be defended against any threats to this core identity. Even though the established anti-immigrant advocacy groups tend to be pro-abortion and pro-birth control, a common nativism is proving to be a stronger unifier than abortion is a divider.

Chip Berlet observed that progressive organizers should not stereotype people of faith. For example, “While most Black evangelicals oppose abortion and gay rights,” he said, “they still vote overwhelmingly Democratic in Presidential elections. Even among White evangelicals, some 30 percent vote Democratic.”

Portions of PRA’s panel will be broadcast on Making Contact, a nationally syndicated radio show, later this spring.

PRA in the Public Eye

The New York Times, “Critics Cost Muslim Educator Her Dream School,” Andrea Elliot, 4.28.08: “Critics of the Madrassa Coalition say its tactics are typical of campaigns singling out Muslims: They lean heavily on guilt by association. The nuances of the claims against Ms. Almontaser were lost as the controversy lit up the blogosphere, said Chip Berlet, a senior analyst at Political Research Associates.”

The New Republic, “Post-Racial—Even White Supremacists Don’t Hate Obama,” Michael Crowley, 3.12.08: “If you are a white supremacist who is dedicated to a biological understanding of racism that says blacks are inferior, the only way [Obama] could be elected is with the conniving of unseen forces,” explains Chip Berlet of Political Research Associates, a Boston-based expert on white supremacists.

LA Times, “Domestic Terror Groups in Disarray After Sept. 11,” Richard A. Serrano, 3.11.08: “Many of the people had such huge egos that they didn’t know how to work together and keep the movement going,” as Chip Berlet, senior analyst at Political Research Associates told the Times, “so it’s basically unraveled.”

WPKN Radio, Scott Harris’ Counterpoint, 3.10.08: Discussing the interesting political calculus behind McCain’s choice to accept [Pastor John] Hagee’s endorsement, Rev. Katherine H. Ragsdale commented that Senator McCain seemed to be willing to “offend moderate supporters in an attempt to appeal to the hard-line Xepophobic Right who had been supporting more radically and outspokenly conservative candidates.”

NewsFactor.com, “Texas Director of Science Curriculum Forced Out,” Frederick Lane, 12.3.07: “The k-12 education system has been fraught with controversy for decades, Pam Chamberlain said, “reaching all the way back to the Scopes Trial in 1925. These battles don’t take place just at the intersection of religion and science; there has been a concerted effort by conservative groups to put their imprint at all levels and on all subjects, including history, science, and civics.”

New Staff

**Alen Abdulla**, is PRA’s Web & Data Manager. Born in Bosnia, he moved to the Boston area in 1997 with his family, earning the MIAA Academic Excellence Award and accolades from the Boston Herald for his high school soccer performance. He is a recent graduate of the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, where he received a Bachelor of Fine Arts. Alen joined PRA in January 2008.

**Catherine Auer** is PRA’s RightWeb Project Editor. She has worked with PRA as a consultant since January 2008.

**Catherine Brady** is PRA’s part-time bookkeeper. She joined the PRA team in late fall 2007.

**Michael Flynn** is PRA’s Right Web Project Director, and has been working with PRA as a consultant since January 2008.

**Meredith Smith**, CPA, began working with PRA in early fall 2007 as a finance and budget consultant.

**Desiree Soares** is Administrative Assistant at PRA. Before joining the PRA team, she was an Administrative Assistant with Children’s Healthcare of Atlanta, Georgia. She is currently a student at Cambridge College pursuing a BA in Psychology with a concentration in Couples & Family Counseling. Desiree joined PRA in February 2008.
PRA 2007 Donors

PRA is grateful to our generous individual and foundation donor partners. Your investment makes possible our unique contribution to the social justice movement—as the only organization that studies all sectors of the Right (secular, religious, and xenophobic) and the tactics they use to undermine the principles and policies that are the cornerstones of an open, egalitarian society. Thank you all!

Note: List of Donors is not available in web version of this document

Protecting Privacy, Preserving Choice

"We celebrate to sustain ourselves for a fight that should have long since ended but has not. We fight, even when weary, frustrated, and spent. We fight because our work is not done. Who would have imagined that a woman’s human right to control and protect and care for her body, and her life, and her destiny would still be a fight in 2008?

“When my grandmother died in 2002, she could not imagine that anything was impossible—she’d seen the impossible occur many times in her lifetime, from the Wright brothers’ flight, to indoor plumbing, to men on the moon, to the worldwide net. She could certainly not imagine that women were still fighting for the basic human dignity of reproductive justice.

But, we have a vision worthy of our commitment—of our passion and our best efforts. I am Ruby Parrish Hancock’s granddaughter, and I do not believe in the word impossible.”

FROM REV. KATHERINE H. RAGSDALE’S KEYNOTE ADDRESS TO THE MASSACHUSETTS CHOICE COALITION ON THE 35TH ANNIVERSARY OF ROE V. WADE, 2008.
least one field researcher.

**Civil Liberties**

PRA took the initiative last year to develop a proposal for an urgently-needed project on defending civil liberties. PRA will research, analyze, and expose the collaboration of federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies with Joint Terrorism Task Forces to carry out domestic surveillance that threatens the civil liberties of all residing in the U.S. Several foundations have expressed high interest in providing grants and we anticipate funding decisions in the summer. Project support will include funding for several new research staff and for our local organizational partners.

**Antisemitism and Islamophobia**

The foundation of several long-time individual major donors to PRA asked us to explore and submit a proposal to address the interrelated problems of antisemitism and Islamophobia on college campuses. PRA expanded on the foundation’s concept and proposed a more comprehensive project. The foundation had a very positive reaction; funding is anticipated in a few months and will support a project leader and other relevant program positions.

**Organizational and Budget Impact**

These four new projects will double PRA’s revenue and triple its research staff! PRA’s challenge now is to secure additional general operating support to build our communications, development, and administrative staff to ensure we can adequately promote these extraordinary programs. The Board of Directors, staff, and I are thrilled and energized by these new challenges and opportunities, and we hope you are too.

**What Made This Success Possible**

PRA’s growth results from the steadfast support from friends like you and the exceptional work of the Board of Directors and staff—as well as the strong foundation Jean built. Donors who invest in our work—the Leaping Left members who have pledged $50,000 a year for three years; other generous pledgers who make it possible for us to plan with greater confidence and accuracy; many current as well as new individual donors who have jumped in to support our work; and our critical foundation donors—all of you make a difference, and we can’t thank you enough.

As we strongly and powerfully move forward in 2008, I look forward to hearing from you with any thoughts, advice, and your own pledge or renewal. If you share my excitement, please tell your friends about PRA. Please also know how grateful all of us are for all you’ve done to bring PRA this far.

_katherine ragsdale_

In May, Making Contact broadcast a half hour radio documentary on civil liberties during upcoming political party conventions, produced and reported by Abby Scher, editor of The Public Eye as part of the quarterly’s continuing collaboration with the show. Building off the article she co-wrote with Heidi Boghosian in the fall 2007 issue of The Public Eye, Abby talks with New Yorkers who exposed the police abuses during the Republican National Convention in 2004, and lawyers in the cities where the Democratic and Republican conventions will be held this summer, as they fight to prevent similar tactics.

During the 2004 Republican National Convention, as Christopher Dunn of the New York Civil Liberties Union recounts on the broadcast, New York police rounded up demonstrators with no cause, held them overnight rather than release them with the usual appearance ticket, traveled the world to spy on nonviolent political activists, deployed agent provocateurs who stimulated fake arrests that aroused the ire of the crowd, and were caught presenting faked evidence against demonstrators in court. By staging confrontations using provocateurs, the police made demonstrators seem like “troublemakers,” changing the message the activists were trying to communicate.

The documentary then takes listeners to Denver, where the Democratic convention will be held, and St. Paul, where the Republican convention is scheduled, where local lawyers face new delays in issuing permits for demonstrations during the conventions—giving organizers little time to plan—and the arrest, fingerprinting and detention overnight of nonviolent demonstrators. In St. Paul, lawyer Bruce Nestor said there was “nothing less than a police riot” in August when police attacked nonviolent demonstrators with mace in what Nestor feared was a dry run for the convention. In Denver, police tracked down a college student who, after spotting an undercover officer at an anti-Columbus Day protest, offered to take his picture, said lawyer Thomas Cincotta: “They contacted this person’s college and, in a formal complaint asked that the student be disciplined for violating the college’s disciplinary code... a sign that they want to protect this undercover surveillance and undercover activity.”

Such actions of local police can be just as damaging to fundamental Constitutional rights to free speech and assembly as the secret workings of the White House.
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For information on additional materials available from PRA, please visit our website: www.publiceye.org and order on-line.

Items on PRA wish list: For the PRA media room, a stand-alone DVD player, and a four-head VCR that plays VHS videotapes (our old ones died).