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# The Haas Institute for an Equitable Society

*In the Nov./Dec. 2011 P&R, we noted that PRRAC Board Secretary (and founding PRRAC Board member) John Powell had left his long-time position as Executive Director of the Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race & Ethnicity at The Ohio State University to head the new Haas Institute for an Equitable Society (formerly the Haas Diversity Research Center) at the University of California, Berkeley. P&R editor Chester Hartman was in the Bay Area in April and took the opportunity to interview John about his new work—what follows is a summary of his responses.*

## Building a Research Institute and an Activist Network

The Haas Institute will have at least seven different research clusters. Each cluster will have two full-time professors—one of them being an endowed

chairholder—plus another 10 professors who will do research around the cluster's themes.

The Institute will explore the similarities and differences between these foci, with a particular attentiveness to the underlying mechanisms that engender marginalization across each cleav-

age and that promote or retard belonging. The Institute will help support the work of each cluster while seeking opportunities to work in a multi- or trans-disciplinary way across clusters to address increasingly complex and intertwined issues holistically. The

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## A State of Emergency on Voting Rights

As the world's leading democracy, our elections should always be free, fair and accessible. This Election Day, however, this core American value is under attack. Some politicians have manipulated the laws for their own gain by passing restrictions that could make it harder for millions of Americans to vote. The people most affected by the new rules are African Americans, Latinos, Asian Americans, young people, seniors and low-income people. Here's how it is being done:

- **Voter ID Laws:** Passed in 11 states, these laws require voters to present unexpired state-issued photo ID with a current address at the polls. Approximately 21 million Americans lack this ID, including 25% of African Americans and 16% of Latinos (compared to 8% of Whites). These laws also stand to disenfranchise Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, more than four million of whom do not speak English at all or less than very well and will face additional barriers to obtaining required documents.

- **Reductions to Early Voting:** Five states passed laws that reduce early-voting periods, which African-American and Latino citizens are twice more likely to use than Whites. This will make ballot access harder for working people.

- **Purges:** Several states are pursuing purges of registered voters from their voter rolls based on flawed suspicion of their citizenship status. Florida took the lead this year, creating a list of tens of thousands of voters to purge—mostly people of color, almost all of whom turned out to be eligible citizens. Now 13 other states are seeking to do similar inaccurate purges.

- **Disenfranchising People with Felony Convictions:** In 2011, Florida and Iowa joined Virginia and Kentucky as the only states that permanently strip people of their right to vote because of past felony convictions. In Florida, Kentucky and Virginia, the disenfranchisement of ex-offenders affects an astounding one in five African Americans—banned from the ballot box, despite having completed their sentences.

Collectively, we are witnessing the greatest assault on voting rights in more than a century—a true state of emergency. We know that Election Day is a day where we are all equal, whether rich or poor and regardless of race, we all have the same power when we walk into the voting booth. That is why we are fighting back—and we're winning.

As organizations representing communities of color we must strengthen our efforts to protect our right to vote and we must educate and invigorate our communities so we can increase our turnout and therefore amplify our voices.

**Supporting organizations:** Advancement Project; Applied Research Center; Asian American Justice Center; Asian & Pacific Islander American Health Forum; Demos; Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies; NAACP; National Council of Asian Pacific Americans; National Council of La Raza; National Congress of American Indians; National Urban League; PICO Network

To find out how you can help these organizations in their efforts, go to [www.prrac.org/vote](http://www.prrac.org/vote)

idea is to both understand and change these cleavages and stratifications in order to build toward a more inclusive society.

Race infuses these cleavages, but it's not just race. Researchers will be looking at race, gender, sexual orientation, immigration, religion, education, health and democratic practices. Race is a part of it, but it's really looking at cleavages in a much broader way.

Given the arrangement of the clusters, we could potentially garner a great deal of research power across the entire University of California system—upwards of a thousand researchers could become involved.

I don't want the clusters to be silos—people working just on sexual orientation or religion. What's the relationship between the two silos? The Institute will foster coherency and collaboration around the foci so that efforts are not siloed.

The Institute's clusters will be part of the hub of a network that will include researchers, community organizers, communication folks, as well as other stakeholders—all in a relationship with each other. This network will develop the necessary leverage that will enable these alliances to address intractable problems and create meaningful change. The hub will help set the research agenda as well as the strategic and communication focus through an iterative, multi-directional process. All of these efforts will be integrated. We will build a table for different sectors to have a voice.

While the research agenda will not be set by the hub, it will be influenced by the hub. Similarly, the strategy and policy directive will not be set by the hub, but substantially influenced by the entire hub and broader network.

The hub and the Institute will conduct and marshal research and other strategic interventions on behalf of the network. Yet the network will also have a role in shaping the agenda.

Ideally, we will be designing an agenda that is relevant and important to organizers, researchers, and to the

most important stakeholders from various communities. This is because they will all have a role in setting the agenda. If the research supports a particular strategy for using the results, there will already be a mechanism in place to use this research outside of academia. These alignments and relationships do not mean that one segment will dictate what another will do, such as particular research questions or a policy strategy, but certainly decisions will be informed by the larger interactions. This alignment will allow the network to scale up and leverage impact on difficult but critical game-changing issues. It will also allow us to direct research attention to issues that matter to communities on the ground, and have general real-world impact.

In addition, we will need a strategy for dissemination and communication—an effective way to move the public discourse. We know that on

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### ***We'll be looking at cleavages and stratification in the society.***

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some issues, it's not enough to have great research or powerful facts that move people; it's power. That is built into the structure from the very beginning. The hub will develop a communication plan that is informed by and in turn informs what the researchers are discovering and the organizers are advocating.

The plan will seek to engage different audiences in different settings, reaching both the explicit and implicit mind. This is especially true as issues become more complex and global. Yet there must be common ground. Our language must reverberate at local and national levels as well. We must make sure we are not having an inside-the-ballpark conversation but know how to communicate outside of our normal network.

The idea is to have an impact. How do you have impact in the world? A couple of things are needed: You have to be able to engage on multiple lev-

els, including upstream. We have to define what we do, not just our area of focus but the nature of the problem. Certainly research and analysis is an important part of this. But it is just a part. There may be times we are responding, but there will also be times we will need to be proactive in designing and creating. You can't do it with research alone, except in limited circumstances. You need to have "a theory of change." One way of thinking about it is that you need organized stakeholders or organizers or community groups. You need organized people who can generate pressure and power and have a different investment in the problems or issues. You need very sophisticated communication at every level—people who analyze how to communicate with audiences that are different from the one you hang around with in your daily practice. And you need to tackle big game-changing issues that affect all of us. If we are serious about changing the world, we have to be engaged in the world—not just in our subject matter or our local community. This does not mean we ignore our area of focus or our community, but rather link them to a more responsive network.

Consider the credit crisis. It is important for virtually every community. Yet many of the important decisions will be made not only outside of a community but also outside of the United States. We have only begun to adjust to the reality that globalization has important ramifications for social justice and inclusion.

The Civil Rights Movement was in part—not entirely, but in part—challenging and opening up public space. Both the Southern reactionaries and the modern Right Wing realized that one way to undermine integration is to divest public space and expand private (and corporate) space. During massive resistance. Southern leaders shuttered public schools and closed public pools rather than integrate. In the modern iteration, the thought is, "Okay, if we lose control of public space and who can be in the public, we'll abandon and attack the public. We'll create private schools, private hospitals, private

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prisons.” So, if we lose public space, the language around this space is extremely racialized. The effect of it is to isolate, and ultimately pulverize, the whole country. It is to dissociate and control the racial other.

If we lose the public—it’s not just Blacks and Latinos—but whites who suffer tremendously. It would affect people whether they envision themselves focused on civil rights or whether they are focused on disability rights, immigration issues or something else entirely. We would lose the middle class as well as much of our democracy. The private sphere that the Right Wing offers in its place is not really private and would not be able to support opportunity for much of society. We have to be conscious about the structure of this space.

It will be important for the Institute and network to have some geographic diversity—for example, in the South. We will work with four or five organizations, possibly some unions, as well as stakeholders, who understand that power is important. We will seek to work internationally as well.

The full structure of the Haas Institute and network are in development because these efforts need to be driven by the nature of today’s problems in an increasingly complex, global world. This does not mean that we abandon the local, but that we are able to effectively work at all of the levels demanded by the problems. Think about foreclosures. Foreclosures directly affect our neighborhoods and communities, but cannot be adequately addressed without engaging national banking institutions and the global credit market and understanding how different communities are situated in relationship to this market.

While research is a centerpiece of the Institute, we want to be clear that it’s not just a research center. Some meetings will be situated in communities themselves, instead of everything being located in academic institutions.

With the amount of resources Berkeley and Haas are making available, we have a lot of fire power. But it’s not enough. There are 10 UC campuses—so there’s no reason to limit our

involvement just to UC-Berkeley. But why limit it to just UC, or even to California at all? We should build a network around the country, and eventually around the world. I think of a network as less rigid and formal than an organization, but more embedded and sustaining than a coalition.

What the Evelyn and Walter Haas, Jr. Fund has done is fund the core part of the research at a great research institution, making some of the best researchers in the world potentially available to work on important issues in a coordinated way. We are also seeking support for the communication specialists and the people who are doing policy work who are not on the academic track. My vision is to have the

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***Organizers and stakeholders should influence research. They should be part of the same table.***

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best in every field—the best communications people at every level and the best researchers at every level. We want to have as much fire power as possible—maybe not a huge number of people, but people who understand this stuff inside and out. We’ve done that.

Part of it will be trying to convince funders why this is a new paradigm for doing the work. We want to build a network that will help us play big and work at a different level. It is not just doing more research or advocacy, but creating a new paradigm for the work. Although there might be some overlap, I do not see the Haas Institute competing with other organizations. We want to support good work that is already taking place and help to build capacity for something that is largely absent. To do this right, we need a substantial amount of funding for those other two legs. But we also need to be in alignment with other institutions and organized stakeholders in order to have the reach we need. This alignment is more than collaboration and less than a new organization. It is a network, with the Insti-

tute as part of the central hub. We will also need funding for the network itself.

There’s very good data showing, for example, that inequality was largely not on the agenda for most Americans. What Occupy has done is change that. A majority of Americans think inequality is a problem. Occupy is a new movement. For the most part they’re young, and, with some exceptions, they don’t have sophisticated communication. They don’t realize how profoundly related to other movements this is, particularly race, to the environment. So it’s not just about inequality of income. It’s not just about people being rich. It’s actually a distortion of everything we consider important in the country.

**Picking “Game-Changing” Issues:**

We need to work at every level on hard, important “game-changing” issues. One potential game-changing issue is the role of corporations. That’s a huge issue. It’s a multinational, global issue, and no one current institution has the capacity to deal with it. The Haas network could have that capacity. Working on the issue, however, doesn’t mean just critiquing it. If at the G-20 meeting they are talking about rewriting financial rules, we would have the capacity to bring the best researchers in the world, not only to bear on that issue, but to bear on that issue starting with the sensitivity and interests of communities, the marginal communities—with the capacity to offer alternatives.

My idea is that you then pick three, four, no more than half a dozen issues like that, really big issues.

I like Deepak Bhargava’s lead piece in the May/June 2012 *Poverty & Race*, “Social Justice Movements in a Liminal Age.” I think he’s right about social movements. I think we’re in this fluid space, right? And it’s not just about who wins and who loses. At some point we are going to settle on some kind of structure/norms that will

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be harder to move away from. I don't know how long this space will stay open—if it's a matter of two years or ten years, but I know it's not forever.

I think this is an incredible opportunity. My own goal is not to, as they say, "build an empire," but to help be part of the movement that creates this different platform so then all the people can take it and run with it.

## The Uses of History:

In some respects, our current moment resembles other historical moments, both during and after the Depression and the Gilded Age. Critical institutions were failing to address the needs of society as our economy changed. One of the most radical time periods in U.S. history was under the Populist Movement. What made it radical is that the Populists realized, even then, in the 1880s, that the excessive exercise of corporate power in politics and financial manipulation by Wall Street was endangering the country. These people were not college graduates. These were working-class, itinerant farmers, many of them white, many of them black. Teddy Roosevelt wrote about this. He said, "No state could regulate corporations. They're too fluid and too big, and they needed a federal platform." The equivalent of that today is a global platform.

What the leaders of that movement realized was that in order to actually challenge this concentration of power, they had to do two things. They had to make an attack on the economic structure of the country and the racial structure of the country, and they had to make both of them support each other. So one of the first things they did was come up with anti-lynching laws. The reason the movement dissi-

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## New on PRRAC's Website

"Potential Sources of Funding for Housing Mobility Counseling Programs" (August 2012): this new Policy Brief is excerpted from the forthcoming PRRAC/Urban Institute report and toolkit, *Expanding Choice: Practical Strategies for Building a Successful Housing Mobility Program*.

The National Coalition on School Diversity's "Status Report on Federal Support for School Integration" provides a comprehensive summary of the Department of Education's programmatic and funding support for school integration in nine key program areas, along with budget summaries from 2011-13.

pated is because the conservative elites were able to use race to trump some of the economic interests in the coalition between blacks and whites, and blacks and whites fell apart. However, that movement was successful for a number of years. We've had nothing like it since then. It's interesting— in

### **Occupy highlights what distorts everything we consider important.**

1880, they were attacking corporations; they saw race as being critical, as a way of actually winning. In 2012, we don't see that. In today's environment, corporations can play on a global stage. They can play nations against each other. Nations are in many respects weaker in relationship to corporations. All this makes the task even more difficult than during the Gilded Age.

## The Role of Communications:

The work that's been coming out in the last 35 years says that about 98% of our emotional and cognitive processes are unconscious. And the unconscious responds differently to messages and narratives than the conscious. In a sense, it has different language.

One of the keys is understanding how you communicate with the unconscious. Part of this involves develop-

ing analysis or research, identifying who you want to communicate to and the institutional structures that are present, and coming up with a set of communication insights informed by that. We already know a fair amount—so, for example, one thing that makes unconscious communication work is repetition.

Part of what we are trying to do is play upstream and create a different platform—a platform in a sense that we've never quite had—or haven't had in recent history—where you have really good analysis. As I always say, "Analysis is not the same as communication." Neither really good, smart communication nor excellent research can work without power. People understand organizing and power all in alignment together.

I remind my students that W.E.B. DuBois had a very radical analysis that linked race and economics, and that got him kicked out of the NAACP, and got him called a communist. He left the country as a result. Martin Luther King had a very radical analysis that linked race and economics. I think that may have even contributed to his assassination. But clearly, these towering figures at some point got it. And it's interesting because DuBois and King never even got the chance to effectively communicate this analysis to the American people. So we don't realize how much they saw—not only economics and race linked together in a national context, but globally. That perspective is especially necessary today. □