



Institute on race & poverty  
Research, Education and Advocacy

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**5**  
*Changing the Public  
Discourse on race and  
poverty issues*

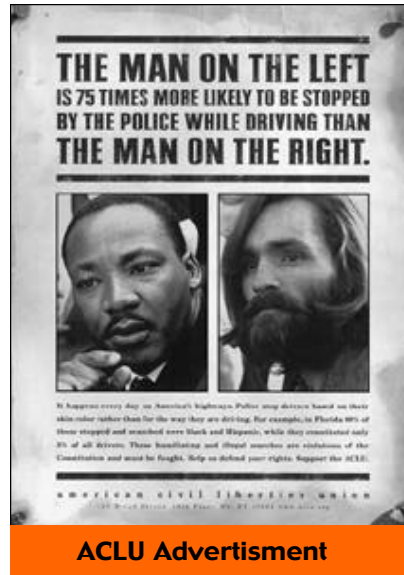
**9**  
*powell participates in  
NPR's "Talk of the Nation"  
program in Charlotte, N.C.*

**12**  
*IRP to be a  
Working Assets  
recipient in 2001*

# abstracts

A Periodic Briefing of IRP Research and Activities

## IRP explores criminal justice system's disproportionate impact on minorities



**O**verwhelming evidence demonstrates that African Americans are disproportionately affected by the U.S. criminal justice system. And much of this disparity can be attributed to racial bias, according to IRP senior researcher Marguerite Spencer.

Consider, she says, that there are now nearly 1 million African American adults in prison or jail in the United States. The U.S. incarceration rate of 690 inmates per 100,000 members of the general population is the highest reported rate in the world, and black men in the United States are incarcerated at a rate of 4,630 per 100,000, almost 10 times the rate for white men.

In addition, African Americans constitute almost half of all prisoners in this country, despite comprising only 13 percent of the total population. Given current rates of incarceration, a black male in the United States has more than a 1-in-4 chance of going to state or federal prison sometime during his lifetime; a Hispanic male has a 1-in-6 chance; and a white male has a 1-in-23 chance of doing time.

Racism in other systems beyond criminal justice – such as housing and education – play a role in creating these racial disparities. However, Spencer believes that the criminal justice system itself is also a player because it fails to account for these larger societal inequalities and thus it perpetuates its own inequalities. The system has falsely assumed that most crimes are committed by persons of color which, in turn results in the disproportionate arrest, prosecution, and incarceration of people of color. "The criminal justice system, therefore, cannot be relieved of its responsibility to remedy these disparities," she says.

Despite worsening racial disparities and their devastating effects on communities of color, the civil rights community, the media and the general public have only recently begun to give criminal justice issues the attention they deserve, according to Spencer. Much of the recent public attention is the result of a public information campaign sponsored by the American Civil Liberties Union.

During the past year, the Open Society Institute of New York City has worked

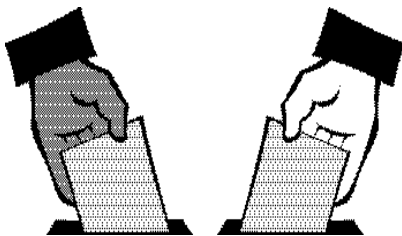
**Continued on page 3**

**Black men in the United States are incarcerated at a rate of 4,630 per 100,000, almost 10 times the rate for**

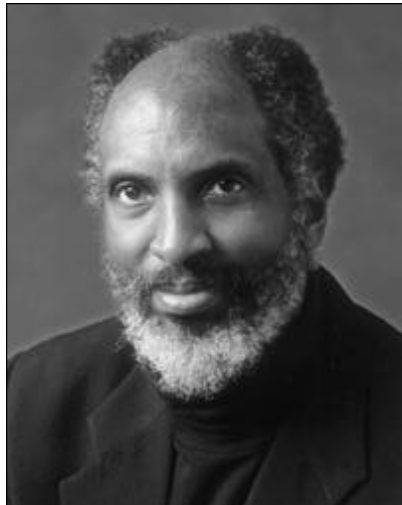
# Institutional, not mechanical, failures are responsible for disenfranchising voters

The real problem with the presidential election was not the much-touted mechanical failures, but rather an institutional failure that is much more disturbing, most notably, the bloodless coup carried out by the U.S. Supreme Court. The Court's action was unprincipled and unprecedented. In the past 132 years, the Court has never applied the Fourteenth Amendment's equal protection guarantee to a federal presidential election. To do so now raises questions not only about the recount, but about whether the entire election could be unconstitutional.

In its zeal to seal the presidency for Texas Gov. George W. Bush, the Court misused the 14th Amendment's equal protection clause to justify its decision. The amendment was passed after the Civil War, largely to protect the rights of freed slaves. It is more than ironic that in breaking with its own doctrine of respecting states' rights, the U.S. Supreme Court intervened in this election at the expense of all voters, and especially at the expense of black and other minority voters.



It is true that there were mechanical failures, particularly in minority communities, but there are institutions in Florida and throughout the country set up to remedy these shortcomings. The U.S. Supreme Court, motivated by its own political agenda, prevented these failures from being remedied. In doing so, for the first time in our history, the Court intervened over a state to suppress the black vote. Although the primary responsibility for this must be placed at the foot of the Court, it was George W. Bush and the Republican



john a. powell

establishment who aggressively pushed this agenda.

Any voting scholar, Republican or Democrat, knows that to apply the equal protection clause to the method of recounting votes, as the court did, without considering the vast differences in voting methods among and within the states, could invalidate not only the recount, but the entire national election and every presidential election held in this country since the passage of the 14th Amendment. To apply equal protection to the varying recount standards but not to varying voting methods is absurd.

Yet this inconsistent logic was used to justify the end of the recount. This, as we now well know, had the most adverse impact on districts where votes were least likely to be counted the first time around, namely those that use older, less reliable methods such as punch-card ballots. These are also districts that tend to have disproportionately high numbers of minority voters. If votes had been counted at the same rate in those districts as in the others, it is clear that Vice President Al Gore would have won, given his 90-percent approval rating among African Americans.

In addition to the debilitating maneuvers of the U.S. Supreme Court, the Electoral College, whose role is spelled out in the U.S. Constitution, virtually silenced the voices of minority voters. Almost 55 percent of African Americans live in the South. These southern states exhibit the most racially polarized voting in the country, with 90 percent of African Americans voting for Gore, and 70 percent of whites voting for Bush.

However, although Gore overwhelmingly won the black vote in the South, blacks from the old Confederacy did not send one delegate who represented their votes for Gore -- not one -- to the Electoral College. This is disenfranchisement of a different order, since it does not involve any confusion over the voters' intentions. Instead, it reflects serious flaws in our election system. By addressing the shortcomings of the Electoral College, we also could keep the Supreme Court from wielding Goliath-like influence in future elections.

**By addressing the shortcomings of the Electoral College, we also could keep the Supreme Court from wielding Goliath-like influence in future elections.**

The Electoral College has a long history of discriminating against blacks. It was created in 1804 as a way to ensure that slave states, with smaller white populations than their northern counterparts, had greater representation in presidential elections. The Constitution provided -- at the insistence of the southern states -- that a slave be counted as 3/5 of a person (with no citizenship rights) for

Continued on page 3

Continued from page 2

purposes of determining the number of delegates each state could send to the U.S. House of Representatives.

This had a direct impact on the number of electors each state is allowed, since electors are determined based on a state's number of U.S. Congressional representatives. In essence, Southern states were given increased electoral leverage because of their slave populations without having to give slaves the franchise.

**However, states have the power to reform the Electoral College without amending the Constitution.**

These devices had the same goal: to increase the power of southern whites while denying full citizenship rights to blacks. When considered together, these two compromises, which were reached to smooth differences between a passionately divided North and South, turn the time-honored American tradition of "one person, one vote" on its head.

To completely abandon the Electoral College would require a Constitutional Amendment, which requires the support of two-thirds of Congress and the ratification of three-quarters of the states. This means only 13 states, representing possibly less than 15 percent of the population, could block such a change. The Equal Rights Amendment has never been able to clear such high hurdles, which suggests that a Constitutional Amendment would be an unwieldy solution to a problem that must be addressed before our next presidential election.

All but two states, Maine and Nebraska, have a winner-take-all approach for their electors. And while there are no existing federal laws demanding that all electoral delegates of a state vote unanimously, it is a tradition that is rarely broken.

Thus, states have the power to reform the Electoral College without amending the Constitution. Changing the selec-

tion of electors to reflect the proportions of the popular vote in each state would help achieve more accurate representation of all voters' intentions, not just a majority, no matter how slim.

For example, under a proportionate system, if a candidate receives 30 percent of the votes in a 10-delegate state, he or she would get votes from three electors.

If proportional representation were implemented in our Electoral College, third-party candidates, such as Ralph Nader, would have the chance to earn their own votes without completely upsetting a particularly tight race.

But more importantly, it would mean that minorities in a state, especially where there is polarized voting, would have a chance to have their votes actually count in presidential elections.

Changing the Electoral College to a proportional system would not fix our states' old broken-down voting machines, but it would make it more

**All but two states, Maine and Nebraska, have a winner-take-all approach for their electors.**

difficult for the Supreme Court and other institutions to appoint a candidate. More importantly, it would help repair our democracy by giving substance to the belief that every vote counts. While this would benefit all Americans, it would be of particular importance for blacks in the South and elsewhere, who are still waiting for a dream deferred.

## Criminal justice system

(Continued from front cover)

with IRP to complete a project called "Strategies to Eliminate Racism in the Criminal Justice System." Both institutes are confident that this project will support both civil rights and criminal justice groups in advocating effective strategies to eliminate racism in the criminal justice system.

The project report identifies and evaluates strategies being implemented throughout the country. IRP staff also make recommendations for improving programs in law enforcement and the judicial system. Key components of the report include:

- An examination of racial profiling by the police as a civil rights violation, and also as an impediment to effective policing.
- A listing of best practices for legislation aimed at curbing racial profiling, including: collecting sufficient data on all traffic stops by state and local law enforcement agencies, linking data collection to mechanisms for police accountability, involving communities impacted by racial profiling in the design and oversight of the data collection, and publicly disseminating periodic reports of the data collected.
- Summaries of sample programs across the nation aimed at eliminating racial bias in all stages of the criminal justice process.
- Evaluations of selected programs.

*A draft report is available on the IRP web site, [www.umn.edu/irp](http://www.umn.edu/irp); a final report will be posted during spring 2001.*

# Meet Board Member Nancy Denton

By Lisa Jabaily

Nancy Denton's background in race and poverty issues began while growing up in the Hudson Valley of New York state. Her experiences there shaped her understanding of the complexities of skin color from a young age.

**"The presumption that every person has equal opportunity, regardless of race or income level, is dependent on making segregation 'disappear' from American discourse."**

"The Hudson Valley is an apple-growing region, and migrant workers were a regular feature of life each fall," explained Denton. "Many of them were black. At the same time, we had a small local African American population. Though certainly tinged with prejudice, attitudes toward the two groups were quite different, even though both were black. This situation taught me that distinctions could be made within racial groups – not just based on skin color."

Today, Denton is an Associate Professor of Sociology at the State University of New York at Albany. She is the co-author, with Douglas Massey, of *American Apartheid*, which was published by Harvard University Press in 1993. The co-authors received the Distinguished Publication Award by the American Sociological Association in 1995.

Denton began her research on residential segregation by race and ethnicity in 1984, and has focused on making

segregation visible, tangible, and historically situated. According to Denton, segregation has become a "given" of American society, timeless and natural. The normalizing of segregation has created a perceptual vacuum in which the notion thrives that individuals need only lift themselves up by their bootstraps to have a successful life. The presumption that every person has equal opportunity, regardless of race or income level, is dependent on making segregation "disappear" from American discourse.

"Segregation is so much a part of the social structure of U.S. life because it is accepted as normal," said Denton. "In my work, I seek to demonstrate that it was deliberately created and that it is beyond an individual's ability to control. That is what makes it so devastating."

People negatively affected by the intersection of race and poverty face many challenges, and it is the multitude and complexity of these challenges that Denton identifies as their greatest difficulty. "They must deal with these combined barriers on a daily and repeated basis, while being told by others that if they just work hard enough, things will be better."

**"Hard work is certainly necessary to succeed, but it is not sufficient – there are many very hard-working people who are still held back by race and poverty."**

White privilege further complicates the picture, according to Denton. "Adding insult to injury, those not adversely affected by race and poverty



Nancy Denton

have no understanding of how the social structure has benefited them. They attribute their own successes solely to their own efforts. Hard work is certainly necessary to succeed, but it is not sufficient – there are many very hard-working people who are still held back by race and poverty."

**"Segregation is so much a part of the social structure of U.S. life because it is accepted as normal"**

Denton joined the IRP Advisory Board in 1995, inspired by the importance of linking social science research and the law. "The linkage between race and any other topic is more significant than either topic by itself," she said. She also had an interest in ensuring more breadth in her own work. "I was interested in being involved with a group with a different discipline that was interested in the same issues I was. If you only stay within your own discipline, you develop too narrow a perspective."

Most importantly, though, Denton cites the personal connections she made at the Institute as the most rewarding. "The biggest benefit to me of being a board member has been that it allows me to see and learn from the leadership and insights of John Powell. Getting to know him, as well as so many others who are on the board, has been an enriching experience for me."

# Changing the public discourse on race and poverty issues

Last year, two major national media outlets, the *New York Times* and *Newsweek Magazine*, produced series on how race affects day-to-day living in America. The focus, in large part, is spurred by dramatically changing demographics in the United States. Predictions state that people of color will represent the majority of our population by the year 2050.

Unfortunately, when the media or other opinion leaders embark on a discussion of race, many assumptions about the topic severely limit how it is treated. IRP Executive Director John Powell has put it this way, "Because of limitations on discourse, those who want to talk about race start off in the hole."

Most often, racism simply is unacknowledged. Indeed, as Makani N. Themba of the Applied Research Center points out, in an article she wrote entitled "How Race is Lived in

the Media: *The New York Times* Misses the Mark." It suggests racism is often trivialized as nothing more than personal relations. By ignoring the institutions, laws and systems that provide the context for race relations, Themba suggests that these structures are left off the hook.

The Institute plans to address structural and institutional racism by coordinating a national conference on how to more effectively address the topic of race in public dialogue during fall of 2001. "We have two broad goals for the conference," says IRP Director of Research Gavin Kearney. "First, we want to better understand the dynamics of public discourse and the ways public discourse affects efforts to address racism. And second, we hope to highlight successful strategies and develop new strategies for changing public discourse in ways that aid anti-racist efforts. In fact, our hope is to make the conference part of a larger campaign to change the various levels of public discourse on race."

"It is important that we focus not just on the filters of discourse (like the media or policymakers), but also on the nature of discourse itself," adds Powell. "The nature of this discourse has been very dynamic." Shifts in public discourse on race illustrate an evolution of societal assumptions. "In the 1950s and 60s, the assumption was that most white people were innocent of the disparate conditions people of color experienced within the United States," says Kearney. "In the post-civil rights era there is a sense that 'We've done it,' that racism is in the past. Because of that, today many people assume that we are all on equal footing, and that structures are fair or natural."

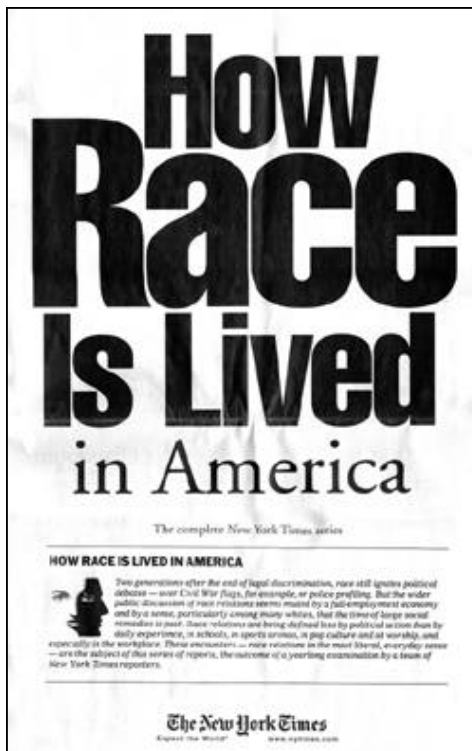


Gavin Kearney

Although the media plays a key role in the way public discourse is shaped, many other sectors are also influential. For example, when grant-makers develop program guidelines and fund research projects, they encourage certain types of research and ways of defining social problems.

**"It is important that we focus not just on the filters of discourse (like the media or policymakers), but also on the nature of discourse itself."**

"While one conference is not enough to effect change on all the types of public discourse", says Kearney, "we hope that it will help to raise awareness about the way race is addressed in the public domain. It will also allow us to develop some key strategies for social justice advocates to pursue in eliminating racist policies and practices." The Institute will publish regular updates on the conference as plans are finalized.



# IRP initiative works to connect Smart Growth and racial justice



Vina Kay

The Brookings Institution reports that 35 statewide measures and hundreds of local measures appeared on November's ballot, addressing issues ranging from open space preservation and other restrictions on growth to transportation funding

Limiting sprawl, promoting smarter development, and directing investment back to the city are all key strategies for improving the health of our regions, particularly for those struggling against disinvestment trends and the concentration of racialized poverty in the city.

**"The goal of this project is to link Smart Growth strategies with the civil rights concerns of low-income communities of color."**

But it is crucial that the negative side-effects of growth management are addressed to the extent possible, including increased land values that can price out families of color out of a region in order to ensure equity, advocates need to inform the decisions made on growth management and metropolitan planning. At the same time, the public sector, business, and environmental groups would have their goals best served through collaboration with civil rights groups.

With these issues on the ballot in 23 states and more cropping up all the time, there is an urgency to creating strategies that coordinate the work of Smart Growth proponents and civil rights groups, according to IRP senior researcher Vina Kay.

"Many organizations are natural allies, but there are few avenues for sharing strategies and learning experiences," says Kay. "Often, the wheel is reinvented due to lack of communication."

**"Habitat for Humanity had concerns that growth boundaries would drive up housing prices, prompting them to take a position on a political issue for the first time in 21 years."**

The result is that growth management policies often do not respond to the concerns of social justice and civil rights organizations and these policies often harm communities of color.

Take the recent vote in Colorado as one example. There, voters considered a broad-sweeping growth initiative that would seem to halt sprawl. But the initiative did not make provisions for the possibility that land prices might rise and harm the efforts of affordable housing advocates. Habitat for Humanity had concerns that growth boundaries would drive up housing prices, prompting them to take a position on a political issue for the first time in 21 years. The executive director of Habitat for Humanity of Metro Denver, Lori Vaclavik, stated in the *New York Times*, "It is extremely rare for us to do this, and we only did so because we feel this amendment so threatens our mission and the future of affordable housing in Colorado."

Kay says such oppositions need not arise. "If these concerns are recognized and then built into the initiative – say, through a land trust model that holds the value of certain land steady – all sides of the metropolitan growth debate can be winners."

IRP has developed a research project to identify and compile information on the various regional equity/smart growth projects at both national and regional levels. Along with PolicyLink, a national public policy organization, IRP will produce a directory identifying key groups working on regionalism from a social justice perspective. It will highlight their work and place it in the broader context of regionalism and social justice, according to project director Kay. It will also alert key grant-making organizations to the importance of this work, and facilitate information sharing and additional collaboration. The audience includes regional equity intermediaries, civil rights organizations, community-based organizations, policymakers, and grant-makers.

The goal of this project is to link smart growth strategies with the civil rights concerns of low-income communities of color. "Too often, each group works in isolation without reaping the benefits of a common front," says Kay. "Important questions like 'How will this work affect low-income communities of color?' and 'How could smart growth practices alleviate urban problems?' go unanswered. Both sides end up with only half of the winning strategy, and sometimes even defeat each other's goals."

*The project is funded by the Open Society Institute and the Rockefeller Foundation. It is expected to be completed during the spring of 2002.*



*Editor's note:* The following are excerpts of opinion pieces written by IRP Executive Director John A. Powell. The articles in their entirety appear on our Web site at [www.umn.edu/irp](http://www.umn.edu/irp).

## Election system abused the rights of minority voters

*Published in the (Minneapolis) Star Tribune on Nov. 19, 2000.*

Unfortunately, history has a way of repeating itself when it comes to discouraging blacks from exerting their limited political influence.

While much is being made in Florida about the disputed ballot in Palm Beach County, relatively little attention has been paid to the voting irregularities that have had the most pronounced effects on low-income and minority voters.

Minority voters were discouraged from voting in a variety of ways. Some were turned away due to a lack of ballots or were subject to police roadblocks within a few hundred yards of voting places. Others were refused the right to vote because they didn't carry enough forms of identification. Some could not bring translators to assist them with ballots that confused even native English speakers.

Such discrimination is meant to stifle efforts to revive Democratic support in a New South that has become almost wholly Republican, with the possible exception of Florida. Minority advocacy groups, such as the NAACP, made significant investments in get-out-the-vote campaigns this year. The NAACP spent \$12 million on the most extensive voting initiative in the association's 91-year history. And, because of current complaints of fraud and minority-vote tampering in Florida, the NAACP has asked the U.S. Justice Department to investigate irregularities there.

This kind of voter discrimination is nothing new for African Americans in this country. Throughout history, whites have resolved serious differences among themselves with compromises that sacrificed the rights of blacks. An especially relevant example is the hotly disputed 1876 presidential election involving Samuel J. Tilden and Rutherford B. Hayes.

When the votes were counted, Tilden, the Democrat, had 250,000 more actual votes than his opponent, and one more electoral vote. However, the returns from South Carolina, Florida and Louisiana (three states where blacks maintained significant political influence) were challenged. Recounts did not resolve the issue, and it was turned over to a special electoral commission, with a Republican majority.

The Democrats accepted the commission's recommendation to elect Hayes after being assured that the remaining federal troops would be withdrawn from the South, and that the popularly elected Democratic governors for Florida, South Carolina and Louisiana

**Continued on page 8**

## If not the courts, whom can we trust?

*Syndicated by the Progressive Media Project through the Knight-Ridder News Service on Nov. 9, 2000.*

Elections are designed to reflect the will of the people. Given the current presidential stalemate, people throughout our country are questioning whether the will of the people can remain paramount in the face of partisan wrangling of the highest order.

It's a good question, and it's why a neutral arbiter is in order.

When a question of fairness or justice arises, it is the proper role of the courts to decide. This is accepted practice in domestic and business disputes. When parents divorce and cannot decide on custody of the children, we insist that the courts make a determination. And when employees and employers wrangle over dismissals, we insist that courts make a determination. We cannot send the message to our citizens that the courts are good enough to solve our private problems but not matters of critical public importance.

The right to have one's vote counted is one of the most important rights of citizenship, and the courts have played -- and continue to play -- a special role in protecting that right. It should be the role of the courts to decide whether the design of the ballots in Palm Beach County was illegal, whether -- as the NAACP has alleged -- minorities were prevented from voting and where and when recounts should take place.

This doesn't mean that the judicial process can't be abused. Still, it's best to leave these matters up to the courts. Of our three branches of government, only the judiciary is charged with being both independent and impartial. We know that charge is sometimes more an ideal than a reality. Even though we have not attained the ideal, the courts are simply the best alternative available.



*Editor's note:* The following are excerpts of opinion pieces written by IRP Executive Director John A. Powell. The articles in their entirety appear on our Web site at [www.umn.edu/irp](http://www.umn.edu/irp).

## Voter rights

Continued from page 7

would be able to assume their offices without interference from the Republican-controlled state legislatures.

While this compromise resolved conflicts between whites in the North and South, it resulted in significant civil rights losses for blacks in the political, economic and social arenas. They lost businesses, farms and hard-won rights to their children's education in public schools. And shortly after the election, Jim Crow laws responsible for segregating blacks and whites began to appear.

Given historical precedents, it is crucial that our country's compromise in this critically important matter not be made at the expense of minority voters and their civil rights.

One of the few silver linings in this entire election fiasco is that a spotlight will be focused on uneven election procedures in the United States. This will encourage us to squash unethical and illegal procedures experienced during this month's election, and do better by the candidates in the future.

It seems we've made little progress in the past 150-plus years. We are poised again to disfranchise black and other minority voters. Must history repeat itself again in order for us to learn from this painful lesson?

## Racing the Social Security Debate

*Syndicated by the Progressive Media Project through the Knight-Ridder News Service on Oct. 19, 2000.*

There is heated debate over Social Security, but it focuses on how to finance it and distribute its benefits, not how to cut or eliminate it, like many government programs. One key factor obscured in the national debate about how to reform this popular government program is race. The reason so many politicians and voters support Social Security is surely related to the fact that most of its beneficiaries are white and middle-class.

Despite some improvements since its inception in 1935, the Social Security system still perpetuates racial, class, and gender disparities, though in a somewhat disguised form. First, Social Security taxes are regressive. No Social Security taxes at all are paid on incomes above a certain level. Second, once they retire, poorer folks also get smaller monthly payouts than the affluent. People of color have lower incomes than whites. They thus put fewer total dollars into the system and receive lower benefits. Finally, people of color receive benefits for a significantly shorter amount of time than whites, because they retire older and die younger. Notwithstanding these inequities, Social Security represents the most important source of retirement income for most people of color.

Dramatic changes in our national demographics threaten the viability of the Social Security system. As baby boomers reach retirement, the U.S. population is rapidly aging. This

trend, together with an increasing life expectancy and a declining birth rate, means that a larger number of longer-living retirees will be supported by a shrinking number of younger workers. Unless substantial changes are made in the way Social Security is structured, the system is projected to go broke by 2037.

Since the Great Depression, the U.S. government created a social compact, promising that society would support the young in becoming productive citizens and workers. Those productive workers would in turn pay taxes to support the young and the retired elderly. However, today government is abandoning youth of color. Declining inner-city schools, racist housing and zoning practices, and current tax policies have left low-income, largely minority communities alone to maintain their cities and take care of their young.

The solution to the intergenerational and racial tensions is not to cut benefits to the elderly or to refuse to invest in our children. Corporations and workers, especially those at higher income levels, must be made to assume their fair share of taxes. We must insist that existing budget surpluses be used to shore up Social Security and to finance infrastructure and educational improvements, especially in the inner cities. And we must demand that Social Security benefits, upon which retirees of color are so dependent, continue to be guaranteed.

# powell participates in NPR's "Talk of the Nation" program in Charlotte

*Editor's Note: IRP Executive Director John Powell was invited to participate in NPR's series, "The Changing Face of America," which was broadcast during the year from various cities throughout the country. On Aug. 31, Talk of the Nation staff ventured to Charlotte, N.C. to look at how urban sprawl has affected that city and what can be done to prevent it from turning into another Atlanta, the most sprawled city in the country.*

**B**elow is an edited excerpt of the program, which was moderated by the show's host Juan Williams. To view the transcript in its entirety, please visit our Web site at [www.umn.edu/irp](http://www.umn.edu/irp). To obtain a copy of an audio tape of the radio broadcast, please contact Lisa Jabaily at 612-624-2904.

**WILLIAMS:** Now, John Powell, when you see this kind of development in a growing metropolitan area like Charlotte, do you think that growth necessarily benefits people who live in cities? Does it come at a cost to those people? Or does it help them?

**POWELL:** Well, it depends on how it's done. And historically, since World War II, sprawl has been largely anti-city and has been largely negative for people of color. Sprawl was first seriously funded by the United States government in the 1930s, but it didn't take effect until after World War II. . . .

**WILLIAMS:** How was it funded? What do you mean, in terms of the interstate transportation system?

**POWELL:** No, even before that. In the 1930s, in order to buy a house for the first time, often the banks required 50 percent down, and you had five years to amortize the mortgage. This is in the 1930s, during the Depression, which meant that most Americans couldn't really afford homes. And the federal government, for the first time, stepped into the housing market in a serious way. Through a number of acts, it made housing available to most

Americans. But it also institutionalized the appraisal system and redlining. And it made it clear that if you lived in an integrated neighborhood, or a black or Jewish neighborhood, you didn't get a favorable mortgage rating.

And so when it made this huge amount of resources, the federal purse, available to the American public, it basically excluded, for the most part, African Americans. So African Americans were really consigned to the central city. It also favored new construction. So if you had a house and you wanted to rehab the house, oftentimes it was cheaper to leave. So it became cheaper to buy outside of the central city.

So the first wave of sprawl after World War II, which was financed by the federal government was really – frankly, for white folks. And sprawl early on was really white flight.

**WILLIAMS:** What an interesting timeline you are building for us. You talked about how, in fact, you believe the government initially started funding the idea of sprawl in the 1930s, encouraging people to leave the cities, to build outside, not to refurbish existing properties. And you said that those loans went to people who were not black and not Jewish, so in some ways they were discriminatory. Does that pattern, then, continue over the years?

**So the first wave of sprawl after World War II, which was financed by the federal government was really – frankly, for white folks. And sprawl early on was really white flight.**

**POWELL:** Well – and, in fact, it was explicit. The underwriting guidelines for the FHMA made it clear that



Juan Williams

this was the way things were to be done. And the banking industry picked up on this. Take cities like St. Louis. St. Louis in the 1940s was the fourth largest city in the United States; it was a very vibrant city. Basically, they paid white folks to leave the city, to move to the suburbs. Detroit, a city of almost 2 million people, a city now that's struggling to keep a million – the same thing.

So historically, the way sprawl has worked, it's really fueled white flight and it's depopulated the cities. Some of that – we're still living with that reality today. Now Charlotte has actually done it better, because Charlotte has actually grown to annex the surrounding suburbs. Because the real most pernicious thing about sprawl in terms of race is that it creates geographic fragmentation, where you have hundreds of little cities – all fighting to exclude people, all fighting for separate school districts, separate police force, separate tax base. And Charlotte's done better than that.

But whether we do smart growth or not depends largely on how we deal with this issue of racial equity.

Continued on page 10

# NPR "Talk of the Nation" interview from Charlotte

Continued from page 9

**WILLIAMS:** Here's an e-mail from Bob Wencher in Spring Hill, Kan. He says, "Sprawl occurs because people don't want to live in a city. I like sprawl," says Bob. "Not very many people I know wish for that lottery ticket to come through so they can live in an urban apartment. People want to get away from the city. So here I am, way past the suburbs, and happily working in the suburbs. Why should I care about the city?"

**POWELL:** Well, two things. The caller [before] made it clear that some people do prefer to live in the city. The city that's most visited in the United States right now is San Francisco, which is the second-densest city in the United States. But the thing is: What about public policy? We're not talking about personal preferences alone. We're talking about a public policy and a public purse. And in terms of public policy, we care about the environment. The majority of Americans care about the environment.

If we're going to have jobs in the suburbs, and it looks like we are, in terms of trends – then when we affect choice, we have to make sure that choice is not being distributed in a racially discriminatory way, and that's how sprawl has acted in the past.

**WILLIAMS:** And sprawl acts in that way because people who are in the inner-city can't get out to the jobs in the suburbs, for example?

**POWELL:** There are kinds of exclusionary zoning – refusing to build public housing, just old-fashioned racial discrimination. And so one of the things we've been advocating is opportunity-based housing, where housing is located close to transportation and is located to meet the needs of all citizens.

**WILLIAMS:** That would be smart growth.

**POWELL:** That would be smart growth. Cities are not clubs. They're not where you can just get with your friends and keep everybody else out. And that's how these fragmented metropolitan areas have worked in the past.

**WILLIAMS:** Let me quickly end with this question. It comes from Hannah Tobin, age six. And she wants to know from our panelists: "What will Charlotte look like when I grow up?"

**POWELL:** Well, it depends on whether they really pursue smart growth. And I have to be clear that smart growth alone won't address the issue. There's an area called Lower Richland, where the population was 80 percent black. Under the guise of smart growth, they have said you can't cut down any more trees. But it's having a negative effect on the African-American community. So I think we need to decide to grow together as an entire community and do it smartly for everyone.



"Abstracts" is published on a quarterly basis to share IRP research findings, discuss current events influencing those adversely affected by racism and poverty, and to announce upcoming programs. The newsletter is edited by Lynn Nelson, who can be reached at 612.626.2277 and via e-mail at nelso355@tc.umn.edu. IRP staff members also contribute to the newsletter. Design by Derek Brigham - www.dbrigham.com. To be put on our mailing list, contact Lisa Jabaily at 612.624.2904 or jabai001@tc.umn.edu. We share our mailing list on occasion with other University divisions with similar missions and goals. The University of Minnesota is committed to the policy that all persons shall have equal access to its programs, facilities, and employment without regard to race, color, creed, religion, national origin, sex, age, marital status, disability, public assistance status, veteran status or sexual orientation. This publication can be made available in alternative formats for people with disabilities.

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## Civil rights and Smart Growth add up to healthy, socially just metro regions

Showing civil rights groups how urban sprawl and regional fragmentation affect poor communities of color is one of IRP's top priorities. To visually depict these effects, the Institute develops maps that show the landscape of opportunity structures in the Twin Cities and other metropolitan regions.

Some maps, for example, show how the geographic location of entry-level job growth in the suburbs is mismatched with housing and transportation accessible to low-income minority people, who are generally located in central cities.

**"Regional fragmentation is responsible for racial segregation and concentrated poverty. And the health of a region is tied to the health of a city"**

IRP staff members are working with civil rights groups and their constituents to show how they can positively influence urban growth management and metropolitan planning on behalf of low-income minorities. On Nov. 30, IRP researchers Eric Myott and Colleen Walbran shared maps, articles and information at the Growing Smart in Minnesota conference hosted in St. Paul by 1,000 Friends of Minnesota, the Smart Growth Network, the Environmental Protection Agency, and the Urban Land Institute. The conference included representatives from business, development, the public sector, environment, rural and urban concerns, and the social justice community. "The public and private sectors far outnumbered equity groups," says Walbran "showing that there is work to be done if the civil rights community is going to influence metropolitan planning."

Other presentations on emerging legislative issues were made by Stewart Meck of the American Planning Association (APA) and Don Chen of the Smart Growth America. Meck shared a model for Smart Growth legislation that has been developed by the APA, and Chen surveyed the scope of recent state and local ballot initiatives, as well as several proposed pieces of federal legislation. Walbran will analyze these proposals as part of IRP's ongoing Racial Justice and Regional Equity project. Myott, a member of the Smart Growth Network, as well as the GIS (geographic information systems) specialist at IRP, attended conference sessions on revising the state's property tax system and the Met Council's plans to create affordable housing in the Twin Cities region. Myott was heartened that a multi-family development he and others had nominated for espousing the principles of Smart Growth was recognized and received an award from conference sponsors.

This development was significant, according to Myott, because it demonstrates a liaison between intelligent growth and equity. "Early on, the judges gave only minor credit to whether developments contained affordable units, whereas they prioritized other principles," said Myott. "Over time they were persuaded to not only to give far more points for the degree of affordability of the housing but to subtract points from developments that had no affordable units. Were it not for this shift in thinking, this development in a wealthy western Twin Cities suburb might have gone unrecognized." Myott and Walbran left the conference believing that racial justice must be considered a priority while planning sustainable metropolitan regions. "Regional fragmentation is responsible for racial segregation and concentrated poverty," explains Walbran. "And the health of a region is tied to the health of a city," added Myott.

## Send us your e-mail address

If you are interested in receiving announcements from IRP, please send your e-mail address to Lisa Jabaily at [jabai001@tc.umn.edu](mailto:jabai001@tc.umn.edu). We will send you information on upcoming events and news. We'd appreciate it if you would include in the e-mail your primary areas of interest: welfare, housing, race in general, regional planning, education, etc. We share our mailing and e-mail lists sparingly and only with related departments within the University of Minnesota.

**Thanks to Mott**  
IRP would like to thank the **Charles Stewart Mott Foundation** for its **\$370,000 contribution** for one year's general operations support.

# IRP to be a Working Assets recipient in 2001

IRP has been selected to be a Working Assets donation recipient and will appear on customer donation-designation ballots during the year 2001. Working Assets is a progressive long-distance, credit card, Internet services and broadcasting company that was created "to build a world that is more just, humane and environmentally sustainable."

In addition to the services listed above, Working Assets, created in 1985, provides an avenue for customers who want to make a difference in the world through progressive philanthropy and political activism. The company has raised and distributed over \$20 million to nonprofit groups working for peace, human rights, equality, education and the environment.

Working Assets annually provides customers the opportunity to nominate nonprofit groups to receive funding. After an independent foundation evaluates the effectiveness of hundreds of nominees, Working Assets Funding Service employees and board of directors select up to 55 groups for the annual donations ballot. At the end of the year, customers vote on how to distribute the donations among the selected groups. Customers can also vote anytime on-line.

For more information on Working Assets, please visit their Web site at [www.workingassets.com](http://www.workingassets.com). Sincere "thanks" go to Dr. Terri Karis of Minneapolis for nominating IRP as a Working Assets recipient.



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