

From the Director's Desk

By Juliet Ellis, Executive Director



Working on this 20th anniversary issue of *Race, Poverty & the Environment* has allowed us to reflect on how far the environmental justice movement has grown over the past two decades. Rereading articles we published on transportation, urban planning, housing, and leadership development I was struck by how relevant these issues continue to be in today's reality. We began this project in partnership with the California Rural Legal Assistance Foundation's Center on Race, Poverty & the Environment and since 2004, have been the publisher. It's inspiring to see that the leaders from the early years of *RP&E* are still in the fight—working to shape the dialogue around racial and environmental justice. New voices have joined the conversation and the environmental justice movement reflects a robust and comprehensive agenda that is relevant to a multiracial majority.

For Urban Habitat, 2010 is shaping up to be a big year as many of the programmatic seeds planted and cultivated over the past 20 years bear fruit.

Transportation Justice

In the first successful action of its kind in the nation, Urban Habitat helped organize a coalition that filed a civil rights complaint to stop \$70 million in stimulus funds from being allocated to the Oakland Airport Connector (OAC)—an unfair \$500-million transit project. As the coalition demanded, the funds will be shifted to Bay Area transit agencies to help avert service cuts, fare hikes, and layoffs that will affect hundreds of thousands of people. The complaint, filed with the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) by the nonprofit law firm Public Advocates on behalf of Urban Habitat, TransForm, and Genesis, charged the Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) agency with failing to take into account the needs of communities of color and low-income communities when planning the OAC project. (See story on page 34.) We are now moving to broaden this civil rights victory to other communities around the country and to persuade Congress to incorporate easier access to Title VI civil rights remedies in the Federal Surface Transportation Authorization Act.

Affordable Housing

In a major affordable housing victory, on March 12, 2010, Alameda Superior Court Judge Frank Roesch ruled in favor of a suit brought by Urban Habitat that the City of Pleasanton's housing cap violates state law. In the first ruling of its kind, the court ordered the city to meet its share of affordable housing.

Urban Habitat is now working with Public Advocates—the law firm that filed the case—to ensure that Pleasanton zones for this new affordable housing near reliable public transit. Following up on the court ruling, Urban Habitat has been organizing with other housing advocates to sway the city council to accept Roesch's verdict. We've also been fielding calls from people in other cities who are working to use the ruling as leverage in their own communities.

Leadership Institute

This year we also witnessed the graduation of our first cohort of the Social Equity Caucus Boards and Commissions Leadership Institute. Designed to identify, train, and support low-income people and people of color for boards and commissions service in the San Francisco Bay Area, the leadership institute prioritizes boards and commissions seats that influence equity in terms of transportation, development, housing, jobs, and the environment.

All 10 of our graduates are now seated on priority boards and commissions, such as planning commissions in Oakland and Richmond, and housing, parks, and transit boards. We are now interviewing the next group that will be entering the program and working with commissioner-advocates from around the region and state, including first-year program alumni, to equip our cohort with the best possible information and skills for advancing equity in the Bay Area.

P.S.

I've been out on maternity leave for the past few months and look forward to connecting with all of you upon my return in June. ■

& the **Race, Poverty Environment** the national journal for social and environmental justice

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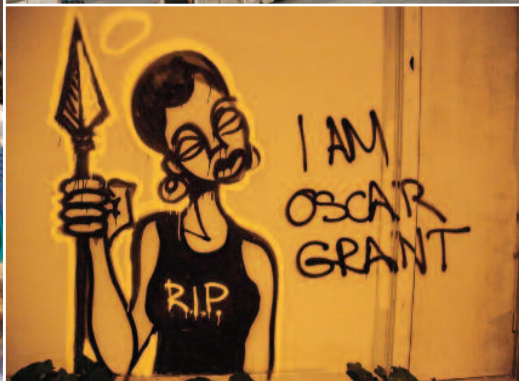
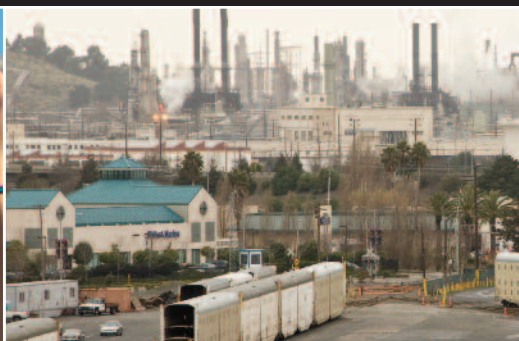
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Economic Justice



Environmental Justice



Racial Justice

Transportation Justice



Spaces, Places, and Regionalism

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(Upper center) Chevron refinery in Richmond. © 2008 Scott Braley
(Lower center) Oscar Grant memorial graffiti. © 2009 Elliott Johnson
(Upper right) Bus Riders Union organizes in Los Angeles. © 2009 BRU
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the Race, Poverty & the Environment



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88

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