

The Structural Racism Racket

Using Anti-Racist Rhetoric To Fight Left-Wing Battles

By W. James Antle III

Summary: The Applied Research Center has a benign-sounding name, but this community organizing group is a scrappy leader among new groups that use anti-racist rhetoric to advance the Left's agenda.

A battle raged during the last election cycle that was bigger than any of the individual races for public office, even the presidential contest. Multiple state legislatures took up bills designed to verify the identity of voters and eliminate election fraud. Seemingly uncontroversial, these laws sparked an extensive debate likely to reverberate over the next several years.

On one side were people who believe measures like voter ID laws are essential to preserve the integrity of our electoral system. On the other side were groups dedicated to the proposition that voter fraud is a fairy tale. The real motive behind voter ID laws, these organizations insisted, is voter suppression: a racist, discriminatory attempt to keep elderly, minority, and young voters—especially those likely to cast ballots for Democrats—from the polls.

The more extreme version of this narrative likened voter ID proposals to the racist caste system of the Jim Crow era, when poll taxes, discriminatory laws, and lynch mobs kept



ARC's Brentin Mock says voter fraud "has been exposed by civil rights watchdogs and a wide range of journalists as pure conspiracy theory."

black Americans from exercising their right to vote. In this telling, private groups that monitor polling stations, no matter how peacefully, are at best engaged in acts of intimidation. At worst, they're lynch mobs.

Mock the Vote

This interpretation of anti-voter fraud measures colored mainstream media coverage. When covering state-level debates on the issues, the liberal cable news network MSNBC

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APPLIED RESEARCH CENTER

Racial Justice Through Media, Research and Activism

flashed across the screen “Block the Vote”—a play on the MTV youth voter outreach campaign slogan “Rock the Vote.”

What is less well known is the role in helping to drive this coverage that was played by a relatively obscure “national racial justice organization” called the Applied Research Center (ARC). In April 2012, ARC’s online publication *Colorlines* announced it was teaming up with the left-wing magazine *The Nation* to provide in-depth coverage of so-called voter suppression efforts nationwide throughout the election cycle.

The joint ARC/*Nation* campaign helped to frame the issue for opponents of voter ID laws. Brentin Mock, one of the leading reporters behind the effort, wrote, “Voter

fraud as a thing [*sic*] has been exposed by civil rights watchdogs and a wide range of journalists as pure conspiracy theory.”

Mock blasted as “anti-voting rights activists and voter fraud hucksters” Hans von Spakovsky, a Heritage Foundation legal scholar and former member of the Federal Election Commission, and *National Review* columnist John Fund, both of whom have written extensively on the subject of voter fraud. Mock described the Tea Party-affiliated True the Vote as one of many groups that “plugged itself into an existing infrastructure of influential far-right organizations hellbent on criminalizing abortion, banishing gun control, repealing the Affordable Care Act—and now, on intimidating would-be voters.”

The crux of Mock’s coverage was that most alleged examples of voter fraud were harmless acts, like handing out bottled water to voters in line at polling stations or pranks like registering to vote in Las Vegas under the name of Dallas Cowboys quarterback Tony Romo. By contrast, Mock saw virtually all attempts to curtail voter fraud as nefarious. He quoted a University of Florida political scientist who described a Tampa Tea Party group’s challenges of some names on the rolls as “the privatization of voter suppression.”

Mock went so far as to express incredulity that “a Rasmussen poll showed that 64 percent of Americans believe voter fraud exists.” He wrote of a True the Vote event—which he described as “Screw the Vote”—at which many of the speakers “spoke about the voter ID cause as if they were failing, as if sixteen

states didn’t pass photo voter ID laws, most of them in just the past eighteen months.”

“It’s like the Koch-funded propaganda campaigns to block climate change truths by declaring it a hoax,” Mock added. “Except here they use an actual hoax—voter fraud—to block voting rights.”

Colorlines editor Aura Bogado, a Yale-educated veteran of the far-Left Pacifica Radio Network, was described as “acting as eyes and ears in key districts around the country” in her work with the ARC/*Nation* project. She wrote an extensive piece for *The Nation* arguing that Arizona was effectively preventing American Indian residents from voting. Bogado also co-produced a video documentary tracking the process by which a Navajo elder obtained a legal voter ID.

After the 2012 elections, Bogado wrote that it was “essentially true” that “voter suppression efforts were soundly defeated.” She nevertheless urged readers to be vigilant against voter ID laws and similar policies. The “stakes aren’t lost on community groups around the nation that hope to continue their voting rights work, even without the spotlight of a presidential election,” she advised.

It is illegitimate, she added, to ask voters to prove their identities at the polls by presenting some form of legal identification. Mandatory proof of U.S. citizenship for new voters, reduced early voting hours, restrictions on voter registration, and anything leading to long lines at the polls were all “frivolous and built upon false pretenses of voter fraud.” In

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her view they are more examples of voter “disenfranchisement.”

The ARC/*Nation* “Voting Rights Watch” project also intensely criticized state laws that restrict the voting rights of convicted felons. “People convicted of felonies in Virginia are banned from voting, but those who live in Virginia and were convicted in *other* states are not banned,” Mock warned. Of Virginia’s felons, Mock concluded, “These citizens deserve the same opportunity for re-entry into society that the Confederate states were given after losing the Civil War.”

It’s worth noting that Virginia Governor Bob McDonnell, a Republican, announced in his 2013 State of the Commonwealth speech that he supported GOP-sponsored bills to automatically restore civil rights—such as voting rights—for nonviolent felony offenders. Voting Rights Watch reported on this development, which would seem to complicate the narrative that all voting-related concerns are merely Republican efforts to pad their ballot box totals.

ARC and its affiliates do not constitute the sole opposition to voter ID and other state-level electoral integrity measures that were debated throughout 2012. Far from it. Numerous disputes raged in state capitals, federal and state courts, and congressional committees. But ARC reporting and coverage played an influential role, providing much ammunition for those who wanted to argue that such policies are antithetical to voting rights—and Democratic turnout.

‘Private Solutions Aggravate Disparities’

ARC is interested in far more than fighting voter ID laws and funding articles that deny the existence of voter fraud. Founded in 1981, the Applied Research Center is billed as a “racial justice” think tank. Operating

out of Brooklyn, New York, and Oakland, California, it seeks to fight what it calls the “structural racism” endemic in the United States.

The organization describes its mission as acting to “popularize racial justice and to prepare people to fight for it.” How literally the people should fight for it is open to interpretation. The outfit’s website prominently features a quotation by Frederick Douglass, written when black people were actually enslaved in the United States:

“If there is no struggle there is no progress ... This struggle may be a moral one; or it may be a physical one; or it may be both moral and physical; but it must be a struggle,” Douglass wrote in 1849. “Power concedes nothing without a demand.”

ARC has many demands of people in power. The organization favors race-conscious affirmative action programs; redistributive spending policies that “narrow the racial wealth divide,” and it supports a government-run universal health care system, presumably to the left of the Affordable Care Act signed into law by President Barack Obama.

On health care, ARC notes that “people of color are more likely [than whites] to not have insurance.” Therefore, it wants Medicaid and other government health care programs expanded. But most of the health care research on its website attacks proposals from George W. Bush’s presidency rather than significantly engaging the Obama-era health care battles.

For example, an ARC paper warns, “Bush’s proposal to privatize healthcare worsens racial disparities.” The writer, Megan Izen, deplores the impact of “President Bush’s healthcare privatization plan” on “communities of color,” but it isn’t entirely clear what plan ARC is referencing. It seems to be an attack on Bush’s proposed tax credits to help people buy private health insurance and the

Medicare prescription drug benefit, which contained some free-market elements but also increased government spending and the Medicare program’s unfunded liabilities.

The ARC report claims small business owners in Idaho weren’t satisfied by the tax credits. “The other businesses in my community feel that tax credits just aren’t enough. The costs are too high,” says a small business owner interviewed by the Idaho Community Action Network. “What we really need from the President is a public insurance program that all owners and their employees can access for quality care.”

Rinku Sen, then ARC’s communications director, went further. “As the entire nation struggles, the President would like us to forget that health disparities continue to run along the color line, demanding a solution that looks toward the margins,” Sen wrote. “President Bush should develop solutions that work for all Americans, not just the wealthy and white. Private solutions aggravate disparities. Public solutions have eliminated them.”

ARC repeated this line of argument in response to President Bush’s 2006 State of the Union address. “The State of the Union address has confirmed our worst fears. President Bush is committed to the failed path of tax cuts and private accounts rather than taking real leadership in the face of a national crisis,” Sen said. “Only a public solution will work for all Americans, and his continued disregard is literally making people sick.”

Sen is now the group’s president and executive director.

The organization also released a report entitled, “Closing the Gap: Solutions to Race Based Health Disparities.” That paper similarly touted government over private solutions. Citing “one municipal children’s



Rinku Sen

health initiative” [sic] which it said “reduced the number of uninsured children in a California county by 62% in just one year,” ARC claimed this reduction demonstrated the “power of public led initiatives.

President Obama’s Affordable Care Act expands Medicaid, SCHIP, and other government programs, but also offers subsidies for private health insurance, like President Bush’s Medicare prescription drug benefit.

The Color of Green Jobs

The Applied Research Center also advocates for a “green economy,” demanding governmental subsidies for renewable energy and other environmental initiatives. In 2008,

Colorlines devoted a special edition to the subject of “Who Gains What from the Green Economy?”

Preeti Mangala Shekar wrote that green jobs offered hope that the “crises-ridden worlds of economics and environmentalism would converge to address the other huge crisis,” American racism. “Gray capitalism” could be replaced by a “green, more equitable economy.”

“When the dotcom boom went bust, you didn’t see no Black man lose his shirt,” activist Van Jones is quoted as saying. “Black people were the least invested in it.” The following year, Jones stepped down as special

adviser for green jobs at Obama’s Council of Environmental Quality after questions emerged about his past associations with Marxists and his signature on a petition organized by 9/11 “truthers.”

Another ARC advocate for green jobs was Raquel Pinderhughes, a professor of Urban Studies at San Francisco State University. But she worried about inequality. “Green economics needs to be eventually policy-driven. If not, the greening of towns and cities will definitely set in motion the wheels of gentrification,” Pinderhughes argued, warning that people of color could end up being “cheap labor” and “exploited consumers.”

ARC also published a “toolkit” promoting equity in green jobs. The analysis stated that too many of the executive positions in the green construction companies were held by whites. “When creating green jobs, our eyes must be on quality and equity,” the report’s authors write. “We must consciously strive, and concretely plan, to achieve racial, gender and economic equity.” Marginalized communities “deserve priority attention when creating new opportunities.”

Van Jones is prominently quoted in the green jobs toolkit. Elsewhere this former member of the Maoist “socialist collective” Standing Together to Organize a Revolutionary Movement (STORM) has explained why the Left has jumped on the green jobs bandwagon: “Right now we say we want to move from suicidal gray capitalism to something eco-capitalism where at least we’re not fast-tracking the destruction of the whole planet. Will that be enough? No, it won’t be enough. We want to go beyond the systems of exploitation and oppression altogether....

So the green economy will start off as a small subset, and we are going to push it and push it and push it until it becomes the engine for transforming the whole society.” (See the November 2012 *Green Watch* for more on the green jobs crusade and Van Jones.)

The ‘I Word’

Immigration is also a major focus of ARC’s research and activism. “Who is an American?” the group asks. “ARC believes that the the [*sic*] answer should not be an ‘accident of birth’ but a reflection [of] reality.” Current immigration policies “work to criminalize and demonize immigrant communities, separate families and exploit labor,” not fully recognizing the “millions of immigrants” who “make this country their home.”

“To build a United States that values all Americans,” ARC recommends, “we need immigration laws that protect people rather than attack them.”

ARC is not particularly concerned about whether immigrants themselves obey immigration laws. In fact, it wants to see the word “illegals” and the phrases “illegal immigrant” or “illegal alien” banished from the media and popular debate. The “Drop the I-Word” campaign strives to “eradicate the slur ‘illegals’ from everyday use and public discourse.”

“The campaign is made up of individuals and communities from across the country that demand respect and reject the i-word as a designation of our neighbors, children, families and ourselves,” ARC explains. “We call on media outlets and elected officials to uphold reason, due process and responsible speech by dropping the i-word.”

One thing that makes the i-word “harmful,” ARC says, is the way it is “used to dehumanize and discriminate against immigrants and people of color regardless of migratory



status.” But the think tank doesn’t really want the i-word used to describe people who are actually in the country illegally, either.

“Use of the i-word ignores the fact that our laws are unjustly applied,” ARC’s website states. “Immigrants without documents are regularly hired as cheap, exploited labor.” Employers who hire such immigrants, as well as those who benefit from the cheap labor, are not usually called “illegal.”

“No one should ever be labeled this way,” ARC states. “No human being is illegal.” But ARC has no discussion of the ways that working-class Americans—many of them black and Hispanic members of “communities of color”—are often harmed by such “cheap, exploited labor.” ARC also does not mention whether it approves of describing human beings as drunk drivers or murderers if they are duly convicted of violating those laws.

ARC also opposes the Obama administration’s attempts to deport illegal immigrants, or persons who have been called the i-word. Rinku Sen published a blog post titled, “Dear President Obama. Stop deporting people. Thanks.” Sen’s article supported a larger campaign by the National Domestic Workers Alliance and the National Asian Pacific American Women Forum called, “We Belong Together.” The campaign included, as Sen put it, people writing letters to the president “expressing their reasons for stopping his mad deportation project.”

“The president appears now to be alarmed that his legacy on immigration might end up being ‘the most deportingest president in history,’ and he does not like that,” Sen wrote. “He can drop the label by moving

immigration reform, and he can also drop it by, well, just not deporting people.” It is unclear whether this means ARC opposes all deportations for any reason.

A *Washington Post* exposé, done in conjunction with the Center for Investigative Journalism, actually found that the White House’s claims of “record deportations” were exaggerated. But the Obama administration has largely focused on deporting aliens with dangerous criminal histories, leaving the majority of people in the country illegally alone. Even if the total number of deportations is high, the administration has already suggested that people working illegally, as well as young illegal immigrants who would have benefited from the defeated DREAM Act’s amnesty, are not enforcement priorities.

In her 2008 book *The Accidental American: Immigration and Citizenship in the Age of Globalization*, Sen advocates the free flow of immigrants across international borders. The book is about about Moroccan immigrant Fekkak Mamdouh, who became a partner in Sen’s activism after the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Sen complains that the U.S. government cracked down on immigrants after the attacks.

The ‘Colorlines’ of Money

While ARC-affiliated activists complain about the funding given to their ideological opponents by wealthy people like the Koch brothers, the think tank receives generous support from George Soros and the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, whose endowment comes from the Kellogg breakfast cereal fortune, among other wealthy financial backers. ARC’s website still prominently features a campaign to raise \$30,000 in 30 days to celebrate its 30th anniversary in 2011.

ARC appears to have taken in more than \$2.5 million in revenues in 2009, and by the end of that year to have had just shy of \$3 million in assets. Between 2005 and 2010, the ACORN-associated Tides Foundation pumped \$1.12 million into ARC’s coffers. ARC also took in \$715,000 from Soros’s Open Society Institute over the same period.

The Service Employees International Union (SEIU) paid ARC \$200,000 for “consulting” in 2011. ARC received \$3.1 million in grants from the Ford Foundation since 2001, according to FoundationSearch.com. But the multi-billion-dollar W.K. Kellogg Foundation has kicked in substantial funds in recent years.

Based in Battle Creek, Michigan, Kellogg contributed \$1.2 million to ARC for general operational support in 2010. A \$400,000 three-year grant followed in March 2012, as did another \$3.6 million three-year commitment in September. Kellogg is one of the nation’s leading funders of the “structural racism” theory, pouring \$75 million over five years into an “American Healing” initiative.

One of structural racism’s most outspoken advocates is Eric Mann, who wrote the following for the Poverty and Race Research Action Council (which was co-founded by a Tides board member who has also helped lead the Structural Racism Caucus whose members include ARC): “the U.S. empire ... self-nominates as the main cause of organized racism and national oppression in the world.” Mann hopes to see a global movement for reparations that “will be driven by years or even decades of a ‘crimes against humanity’ tribunal, with European and U.S. imperialist civilization on trial.” The tribunal’s findings would “challenge the very legitimacy of the

U.S. to exist as a nation state, and call into question its settler-state history of genocide against both indigenous peoples and blacks.” (Funders of the Poverty and Race Research Action Council include the Kellogg, Rockefeller, Ford, Mott, and Tides foundations. For more on structural racism and its funders, see *Foundation Watch*, July 2011.)

ARC has published a paper urging greater cooperation with gay rights groups, titled “Better Together: Findings on the Relationships between Racial Justice Organizations and the LGBT Communities,” which concludes more money is needed. The Kalamazoo-based Arcus Foundation obliged, donating \$300,788 in 2009 and 2010 to “advance LGBT leaders, issues, and ideas” within the “racial justice movement.”

The Akonadi Foundation gave ARC \$225,000 between 2008 and 2010 to advance “racial justice” through research and advocacy journalism. The Baltimore-based Annie E. Casey Foundation has been an occasional contributor, most recently giving \$87,350 for “technical assistance” in 2006. The Marguerite Casey Foundation supplied \$300,000 in 2008. The Public Welfare Foundation, Inc., based in Washington, D.C., contributed \$100,000 for general support in 2010.

‘Stir It Up’

The Applied Research Center’s most public face is president and executive director Rinku Sen. In addition to her book arguing for open immigration, she also published *Stir It Up: Lessons in Community Organizing and Advocacy*. Some consider this a bible for community organizers. “Not only was her manual on community organizing my first introduction to strategic movement building, I felt I found a role model in this young, bril-

liant, powerful South Asian woman,” wrote Rima Chaudry of the Ella Baker Center for Human Rights.

Sen is a 1988 graduate of Brown University in Providence, Rhode Island, where she earned a bachelor’s degree in women’s studies. She received her master’s degree in journalism from the Columbia School of Journalism in 2005. Sen’s activism has long attracted recognition in progressive circles. She won the Gloria Steinem Women of Vision Award in 1996. That same year, *Ms.* magazine included on their “21 feminists to watch in the 21st century” list. Sen has also been recognized by the Ella Baker Center.

The *Utne Reader* listed Sen among “50 visionaries who change our world.” She has also received fellowships from the Women’s Media Center, the Hunt Alternative Fund, and the Rockwood Leadership Institute.

In addition to her duties at ARC, Sen has been involved in a number of left-wing groups. She is a board member for Working America, the AFL-CIO community organization that bills itself as working “against wrong-headed priorities favoring the rich and corporate special interests over America’s well-being.” She is also on the board of the Philanthropic Initiative for Racial Equity, a Tides Center project started to fight “institutional and structural racism,” and the Restaurant Opportunities Centers United, which says it fights for better wages and working conditions for low-paid restaurant workers.

Additionally, Sen chairs the Media Consortium, a “network of the country’s leading, progressive, independent media outlets,” and was vice chair of the Schott Institute for Public Education, which has donated money

to ARC. Sen has been an official with the Center for Third World Organizing, which seeks to build a social justice movement “led by people of color.” A native of India, Sen can often be found with knitting needles in her hands, ARC’s website reports.

The Applied Research Center is a well-funded organization active on many fronts and operating under the radar in many hot-button debates. It considers itself an organization committed to social justice. But does it want justice for all?

W. James Antle III is editor of the Daily Caller News Foundation. His new book, Devouring Freedom: Can Big Government Ever Be Stopped?, will be published this month by Regnery.

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Many thanks.

Terrence Scanlon
President

PhilanthropyNotes

President **Obama** finally found a few groups that he doesn't want to give tax dollars. The **Federal Emergency Management Agency** (FEMA) has refused to provide aid to more than 200 houses of worship in the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic regions affected by "Superstorm" Sandy, which made landfall in late October. But "there's no constitutional reason why houses of worship, which often are the first to provide timely disaster relief to hard-hit communities, should be categorically banned from receiving relief funds to repair buildings. In fact, continuing the practice of allowing zoos and museums to obtain the funds while shutting out churches expresses precisely the kind of hostility toward religion that the Establishment Clause rejects," said **Daniel Bloomberg**, legal counsel for the **Becket Fund for Religious Liberty**.

Nonprofit leaders warned lawmakers at a congressional hearing last month that tinkering with charitable deductions could have serious consequences, the *Chronicle of Philanthropy* reports. "Substantially limiting the charitable deduction at a time when people are still reeling from the recession, unemployment is high, and charities are facing government cutbacks simply makes no sense," said **David Wills**, president of the **National Christian Foundation**, testifying on behalf of the **Alliance for Charitable Reform**. The House Ways and Means Committee heard that limiting the value of the charitable deduction would discourage giving and compel nonprofits to cut back on the services they provide to those in need. The committee created 11 working groups to prepare for the tax reform debate, including one focusing on charitable organizations.

Conservatives are still severely outgunned in the world of philanthropy, **David Horowitz** and **Jacob Laksin** write in their recent book, *The New Leviathan* (Random House). As of 2009, "the financial assets of the 115 major tax-exempt foundations of the Left identified by our researchers added up to \$104.56 billion," or 10 times greater than the financial assets of the 75 major foundations of the Right.

The **John S. & James L. Knight Foundation** released a statement saying it regrets paying author **Jonah Lehrer** \$20,000 to speak at a conference. Lehrer, an admitted plagiarist, was to speak about a book he wrote on decision making but instead spoke about the scandal last year over his unethical behavior. "There are important lessons here for all of us as decision makers and supporters of information projects," said the foundation's president **Alberto Ibargüen**. Foundation partners should not "think that journalism controversies are too hot for them to handle ... we want to send the message that when things go wrong the best action is to admit the error and get back to work."

Teach for America founder and CEO **Wendy Kopp** announced she is stepping down as head of the nonprofit teacher-recruitment group. Kopp will chair the group's board of directors and remain CEO of its affiliated global network, **Teach for All**. Current president **Matt Kramer** and COO **Elisa Villanueva** will take over as co-CEOs of Teach for America this month.

Goldman Sachs WATCH

Regulatory changes will soon force Goldman Sachs Group Inc. to severely curtail its participation in its own private equity funds, which provide one of its most lucrative lines of business, the *Wall Street Journal* reports. The so-called Volcker rule, expected to take effect this summer, was written to prevent banks from making large bets with their own funds. The investment bank will likely have to reduce its investment in the funds to as little as 3 percent, down from the current 37 percent.