
TWENTY-FIVE YEARS OF THE PROGRAM FOR RESEARCH ON BLACK AMERICANS

Note from the Editor and Program Director

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James S. Jackson, Director, Program for Research on Black Americans

The publication of this special double issue is one of the first events commemorating the 25th Anniversary of the Program for Research on Black Americans (PRBA). The Program for Research on Black Americans was established in 1976 at the University of Michigan's Research Center for Group Dynamics, Institute for Social Research, by an interdisciplinary team of social scientists and students. The driving force behind this effort was a conviction that high-quality national data on African Americans was critical for advancing academic scholarship and developing effective public policy.

The signature study of the Program for Research on Black Americans is the National Survey of Black Americans (NSBA) which was collected in 1979-1980. This survey used a sampling technique that, for the first time, made all African American households--even African Americans living in areas with a small black population--eligible to participate in a national survey. Thus, providing the first truly nationally representative portrait of Black America.

During the initial years of the PRBA, we were simply known as the National Survey of Black Americans. Later we changed our name to the Program for Research on Black Americans to reflect the longer-term programmatic emphasis of our efforts. We are fortunate and extremely gratified that we have been able to grow and flourish for a quarter of a century. This achievement is especially noteworthy considering that our funding is based entirely on research and training grants from a variety of sources, including the National Institute of Mental Health, National Institute on Aging and a variety of private sources, including the Ford, Rockefeller, Grant and Carnegie Foundations.

The Program for Research on Black Americans is an important center of scholarship and research. Currently there are over 350 publications that utilize PRBA data. PRBA faculty have written or edited several books including a Series with Sage Publications (*Life in Black America*, *Aging in Black America*, *Mental Health in Black America*, and *Family Life in Black America*) and a major book on the 1984 presidential election, *Hope and Independence*. The most recent book, *African Americans in a Diversifying Nation* (2000) was edited by James S. Jackson. PRBA faculty are widely recognized for their research in a variety of fields including Mental Health and Men-

tal Illness, Social Gerontology, Family Studies, Social Support, Racial and Group Identity, Religion, Physical Health, Racism and Discrimination, Adolescent Identity and Mental Health, and Inter-Collegiate athletics. Faculty associated with PRBA represent a wide variety of social science disciplines and professional fields including Psychology, Sociology, Public Health, Social Work and Nursing.

An important goal of PRBA is to provide research and training opportunities for social scientists and students of color. More than 70 postdoctoral fellows have been in residence to conduct research using PRBA data under the auspices of various training and educational programs (see ads in this issue for affiliated post-doctoral training programs). More than 150 graduate, undergraduate and high school students have been trained and a large number of dissertations have been written on PRBA data, both at the University of Michigan and other institutions. Currently, the Michigan Center for Research on Urban African American Aging Research (a component of PRBA) holds a three-day summer workshop on African American Aging (see the ads in this issue for summer training programs). The Program prides itself on the lasting mentoring relationships that have been forged over the years between PRBA faculty, postdoctoral scholars, and students.

This issue marks the seventh year of publication for *African American Research Perspectives*. Our first issue in the Winter of 1994 was a brief 52 pages, while recent issues have averaged between 100-120 pages. This special double issue, with approximately 250 pages, is the largest issue to date. We are fortunate that we have been able to provide *Perspectives* free of charge to individuals on our mailing list. Our first issue was mailed to 1,600 individuals, while our current mailing list is approximately 4,100. Like the multi-disciplinary focus of the Program for Research on Black Americans, the audience for *Perspectives* comes from a variety of disciplines and professional groups. Our readers include researchers in the disciplines of Psychology, Sociology, Political Science and Economics, the professional fields of Social Work, Public Health, Nursing, and Education and the fields of Gerontology, Family Studies, Child Development, African-American Studies, Religious Studies and Communication. Additionally, several of the users of *Perspectives* are practitioners and administrators in a variety of health and social welfare agencies, as well as administrators at the National Institutes of Health and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the Department of Health and Human Services.

This special data-based issue of *African American Research Perspectives* is a departure from our usual format. The papers in *Perspectives* are generally short literature reviews and policy summaries written by scholars in the social and behavioral sciences who conduct research on African Americans. *Perspectives* seeks to keep scholars abreast of current findings and to assist in the development of interdisciplinary frameworks on research and policy related to African American life. For this special

double issue, the majority of the papers utilize data from a variety of sources including content analysis, census data and several surveys collected by the Program for Research on Black Americans. The lead article by Jackson and Jones presents an in-depth analysis of a variety of social and economic indicators utilizing census data.

The majority of the papers in this issue are based on the National Survey of Black Americans and the 13 year National Survey of Black Americans Panel Study. These papers examine a wide variety of issues including political participation, attitudes towards the police, religious participation, living in all Black contexts (i.e., neighborhoods, schools, workplace), social mobility, skin color, and fatherhood. Several of these papers investigate various dimensions of psychological well-being and psychological distress. Finally, two of the papers explore various methods for addressing sample attrition in the National Survey of Black Americans Panel Study. In total, this collection of empirical research studies on African American life is a fitting addition to the legacy of inquiry established 25 years ago by the Program for Research on Black Americans.

Finally, in the effort to continue this tradition, please note the Call for Papers at the back of this issue. We return to our usual format in requesting that all submissions be brief 7-9 page literature reviews. As *Perspectives* is a multi-disciplinary journal, submitted articles should have a broad-based appeal to researchers, practitioners and policymakers in the social and health sciences.