1. History, Vision and Major Accomplishments of The People’s Institute

The People’s Institute was founded in 1980 by long-time community organizers Ron Chisom of New Orleans and Jim Dunn of Yellow Springs, Ohio. The People’s Institute was created to develop more analytical, culturally-rooted and effective community organizers. Over the past 25 years, The People’s Institute Undoing Racism™/Community Organizing process has impacted the lives of over 120,000 people both nationally and internationally. Through this process, it has built a national collective of anti-racist, multicultural community organizers who do their work with an understanding of history, culture, and the impact of racism on communities. These anti-racist organizers build leadership in and account to the constituencies where they are organizing.

The People’s Institute believes that effective community and institutional change happens when those who would make change understand how race and racism function as barriers to community self determination and self sufficiency. As stated in Undoing Racism: A Philosophy of International Social Change, Second Edition (Chisom & Washington, 1997), “...[W]hen a society is structured on the basis of race, conformity to the norms of racial roles maintains both inequitable treatment and pathological relations. Undoing Racism,™ with an understanding of the construct of race in America and the role that it plays in community enables the organizer to be transformed and begin the process of community empowerment.”

Today, The People’s Institute is recognized as one of the foremost anti-racism training and organizing institutions in the nation. In a 2002 Aspen Institute survey of eleven top racial justice organizations, five credited The People’s Institute with having the most effective anti-racist analysis. In the last five years, The People’s Institute has:

- Equipped over 20,000 community organizers to implement anti-racist principles through practices in neighborhoods, programs and institutions where they work;
- Tripled the size of its core organizing/training team (to over 40, currently);
- Inaugurated the Jim Dunn Center for Anti-Racist Community Organizing with an Organizers’ Roundtable leadership of 250 anti-racist organizers;

2. The People’s Institute Current Programs and Activities

- **Undoing Racism™/Community Organizing:** An average of 10-15 groups per month participate in The People’s Institute Undoing Racism™/Community Organizing process. Through dialogue, reflection, role-playing, strategic planning and presentations, this intensive process challenges participants to analyze the structures of power and privilege that hinder social equity and prepares them to be effective organizers for justice. The multiracial team of organizer/trainers includes more than 40 men and women whose experience in anti-racist organizing includes years with civil, labor and welfare rights struggles, educational and health reform movements, and grassroots community organizing. All organizer/trainers
remain active in their local communities where they are respected anti-racist leaders. The *Undoing Racism™/Community Organizing* process is utilized by staff, volunteers and constituents of a wide variety of organizations. Additionally, The People’s Institute regularly gives presentations on *Undoing Racism™* to the community at large.

**Community Organizing Strategy Team (C.O.S.T):** Participants in the *Undoing Racism™/Community Organizing* process often seek long-term assistance from The People’s Institute as they develop anti-racist community organizing strategies. C.O.S.T. works with community activists to analyze their organizations, their roles, their relationships with one another across racial and cultural lines. The team assists community groups as they establish goals, identify and develop indigenous leadership, explore the manifestations and effects of internalized racial oppression/superiority, and account to organized constituents. The People’s Institute C.O.S.T. works with a broad spectrum of human service and grassroots organizations, universities, churches, philanthropies, health and human rights organizations, public schools and city governments. Examples of organizations that are working with The People’s Institute as they undertake an anti-racist transformation include the Kellogg Foundation’s Mid-South Delta Initiative, Casey Family Programs (throughout its national sites), schools of social work at Columbia and Fordham universities and Hunter College in New York City, West Palm Beach Public Schools, Institute for Latino Empowerment (Puerto Rico).

**Reflection, Assessment, Evaluation Team (R.A.E.):** The People’s Institute is committed to an assessment process, guided by community leaders, that is based on a community’s values and self-determined goals. R.A.E. helps an organization or group state, observe and measure its vision and values with as much energy and commitment as it measures its “objective” goals and outcomes. This assessment process is based on The People’s Institute *nine core organizing principles*:
1. Undoing racism
2. Learning from history
3. Sharing culture
4. Maintaining accountability to constituents
5. Developing leadership
6. Networking – building a “net” that works
7. Undoing Internalized Racial Oppression (internalized racial inferiority and internalized racial superiority)
8. Anti-racist gatekeeping
9. Undoing manifestations of institutional racism, including militarism as applied racism

**European Dissent:** Twenty years ago, a group of white anti-racist organizers (persons of European Descent who “dissent” from the racist institutions and values designed to benefit them) initiated European Dissent, a collective that explore ways to practice The People’s Institute principles in their personal, social, family and work lives. Since 1989, white anti-racist groups have developed across the country, with The People’s Institute’s assistance. In 2002, European Dissent/New Orleans provided major leadership for a gathering of 65 white anti-racist activists who seek to strengthen the white anti-racist voice in discussions and actions to undo racism.
- **The People’s Institute Youth Agenda (P.I.Y.A.):** PIYA identifies and mentors young anti-racist organizers in colleges and in the neighborhoods where The People’s Institute does its work. Since 1996, youth have modified the Undoing Racism™/Community Organizing process so it is credible for youth. In 1997, they adapted The People’s Institute principles and analysis for a summer Freedom School, modeled on the citizenship schools of the Civil Rights era. Since then, Freedom Schools have reached over 400 children and youth in New Orleans and Oakland. In 2003, Freedom Schools are planned in Seattle, Duluth and Minneapolis, MN, and Atlanta, GA.

- **The Jim Dunn Center for Anti-Racist Community Organizing:** The Jim Dunn Center is a New Orleans initiative of The People’s Institute. It is the fulfillment of the dream of The People’s Institute co-founders, Ron Chisom and Jim Dunn, to have a leadership school for anti-racist grassroots organizers. Jim died before the dream was realized, so the center is named in his honor and memory.

  When it initiated the Jim Dunn Center in 2000, The People’s Institute called together over 250 community organizers from throughout Louisiana who use anti-racist principles and the analysis of The People’s Institute in their lives, their faith, their work and their communities. As we rebuild the Jim Dunn Center, it will serve as a model for Post Katrina Organizing and Advocacy Centers in communities across the South where internally-displaced persons are living and working.

3. **Post-Katrina January 2006 Update**

Floods from Hurricane Katrina destroyed much of New Orleans, including The People’s Institute offices. Along with thousands of other community organizers, many of our New Orleans-based staff, trainers, board members and organizers are still temporarily relocated across the country. Through our networks, we continue to speak out and organize for justice and equity, especially for those internally-displaced persons with few resources who suffer loss and indignity and whose rights of return are threatened.

Dramatizing that The People’s Institute is truly a “net” that “works,” anti-racist organizers across the country and the world:

- Returned a team to New Orleans who work closely with People’s Institute organizers across the country;

- Established a new website, [www.pisab.org](http://www.pisab.org), where we place updates about the People’s Institute family and other organizations fighting for justice;

- Raised over $100,000 from individuals who contributed to a “People’s Institute Survival and Beyond Fund;
• Received funds from foundations for “Organizing Beyond Katrina” to provide anti-racist training, technical assistance, and leadership development to hurricane evacuees, volunteers, and organizations engaged in rebuilding New Orleans and the Gulf Coast;

• Called for a United Nations investigation of the Federal government’s deadly neglect and incompetence, resulting in an official UN investigation of U.S. racism and poverty;

• Through Undoing Racism™ workshops, media events and publications, town hall meetings, strategic planning, and daily conversations, brought the People’s Institute analysis to our personal and family stories of this modern-day diaspora;

• Joined with other New Orleanians to tell the many stories of heroic organizing and action in the face of a racist military, deadly police and indifferent policymakers;

• Initiated a “Katrina family to family” network through which People’s Institute organizers and supporters across the country partner with temporarily displaced families;

• Organized (and continue to organize) fundraisers and collections of clothing and household items in cities across the nation and internationally;

• Networked with the anti-racist therapeutic community to ensure that the anti-racist organizers working in the Gulf Coast region receive the counseling and support they need to stay strong.