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SCHOOL OF LAW

NORTH CAROLINA LAW REVIEW

Volume 42 | Number 1

Article 8

12-1-1963

Introduction: Civil Rights and the South

Robert F. Kennedy

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Recommended Citation

Robert F. Kennedy, *Introduction: Civil Rights and the South*, 42 N.C. L. REV. 1 (1963).

Available at: <http://scholarship.law.unc.edu/nclr/vol42/iss1/8>

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INTRODUCTION

ROBERT F. KENNEDY*

The Editors of the *North Carolina Law Review* are to be commended for an important and timely service in publishing this symposium, which will give readers a valuable collection of expert views on a broad spectrum of civil rights issues.

Some aspects of civil rights have won public attention chiefly through crisis headlines. These, like bright flashes of lightning, have served to reveal the urgency of the general question. But the trained spotlight of professional inquiry may well serve better to illuminate the real nature of the problems and their future development.

I hope this symposium helps to bring about a deeper concern with civil rights among lawyers and other civic leaders. Experience has shown that racial disputes become aggravated if those in a community best qualified to offer guidance and leadership hesitate too long to do so. It seems to me that the pressing questions of civil rights should be regarded by lawyers as a personal and professional challenge, perhaps the greatest of our times, calling for the use of their knowledge and skills for the common good.

All lawyers, whether actively involved in civil rights cases or not, are obligated to uphold the sanctity of the courts and to protect their fellow lawyers from personal harassment because of professional efforts in causes that may be unpopular in the locality. Moreover, the bar has a duty to itself and society to explain that if legitimate grievances are not aired and resolved through the orderly processes of law, the need for expression and redress is likely to generate turbulent and sometimes destructive action.

Lawyers are uniquely equipped to undertake civic education, a function which is vitally necessary and too often left to custom, emotion, and rationalization. This can be carried forward in many ways and in many groups—in fact, wherever the members of a community can be helped to stop and look at their activities and their future in clearer perspective. With proper guidance, more and more citizens will come to realize that discrimination is not exclusively a local matter. They will see how unequal treatment of minorities

* Attorney General of the United States.

causes damage to our national moral health, our economy, and our standing as a nation proclaiming itself the champion of freedom.

It cannot be stressed too often that the struggle for civil rights is a nationwide problem, affecting virtually all parts of the country and every citizen of the United States, whether directly or indirectly. Men and women of the legal profession are unusually well qualified to grasp the full implications of that fact, and to help in making them understood by the general public.

Of course, for lawyers to perform this public service effectively presupposes that they have done their homework on civil rights. A symposium which helps in this professional study, because of what it says or because of what it stimulates, will be of real value to the bar, the community, and the nation.