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PROLOGUE

JUDITH W. WEGNER*

The symposium that follows was conceived in the spring of 1992 in sober reflection on the urban crisis plaguing this nation. The entire country stopped in its tracks to examine the flames of anguish and anger sparked by the Rodney King verdict, which leveled portions of South Central Los Angeles. Editorial writers and lay observers agreed that the grievous deterioration of race relations forecasts uncertain times for our nation's cities.

Confronted with a simplistic diagnosis and a bleak prognosis, it was tempting for the nation, its policymakers and prognosticators to turn away from the issues raised by the Los Angeles riots. These issues, in turn, present myriad troubling questions: Is urban deterioration inevitable? If so, have our great cities outlived their time? Is poverty inextricably linked to race and ethnicity? Are the roots of racism deeper than we can or will acknowledge? Has our system of laws permitted inequity and injustice to persist or simply failed to cure it? Have intransigent afflictions such as these defeated our collective imagination or only our will?

Colleagues at the University of North Carolina rallied to face these questions. The University is home to an eminent School of Law and a renowned Department of City and Regional Planning. A deepening commitment to collaboration has united the faculties and graduate students of these departments in recent years. The University has also drawn a growing number of scholars who, through devoting their energies to the problems of race, poverty, and the cities, are bringing to bear diverse perspectives from fields such as geography, social welfare, journalism, and public health. With the counsel of Professors Jack Boger (UNC School of Law) and Michael Stegman (UNC Department of City and Regional Planning) and the enthusiastic leadership of Helga Leftwich, John Kirby, and all the editors of the *North Carolina Law Review*, our collective effort to face the challenges posed by last year's Los Angeles riots began.

A core premise underlies this symposium issue: that fruitful insights into the Los Angeles riots of 1992 can be gleaned through examination of the similar, although far more widespread, racial disturbances that occurred throughout the nation almost twenty-five years earlier. We

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turned back to tattered copies of the *Kerner Commission Report*,¹ commissioned by President Lyndon Johnson in July of 1967 and formally issued on March 1, 1968, and realized that in that report were contained two remarkable measures by which we could assess our current national plight. First, the careful, detailed findings of the *Kerner Commission Report* regarding the status of African Americans² in cities in the late 1960s—their income and employment status, their educational opportunities, their access to health care, their relation to the public welfare system and to the criminal justice system, and their access to political power—would prove to be a useful benchmark for measuring the progress of African Americans and other racial minorities a generation later. Even more importantly, the *Kerner Commission Report* contained a series of remarkably clear and explicit policy prescriptions which it promised could revitalize urban America and avoid the development of “two nations, one black and one white, separate and unequal.”³ Using the *Kerner Report* as a point of departure, this symposium issue seeks to assess the status and prospects of racial minorities in 1993, and to evaluate whether the *Report’s* integration and enrichment policy strategies remain viable today. Because the *Kerner Report* focused in particular on the status of African Americans, many of the essays that comprise this special issue share a similar emphasis, while at the same time discussing the significant changes that have occurred as America’s cities have become more multi-ethnic in character.

Our contributors, nationally recognized scholars in their fields, bring diverse disciplinary backgrounds and personal perspectives to these difficult issues. The introductory essay provides important background information on the relationship between race and poverty and the current status of American cities. In the introduction, Jack Boger (UNC School of Law) reviews the Kerner Commission’s findings, pondering whether the Commission was correct in its predictions about the future of the nation’s cities and their African-American populations, and whether its policy prescriptions have continuing relevance in 1993. Next, Peter Dreier (Occidental College Department of International and Public Affairs) discusses the increasing isolation of cities in national politics and the fiscal and social problems that confront them, probing for

1. REPORT OF THE NAT’L ADVISORY COMM’N ON CIVIL DISORDERS (Bantam Books 1968) [hereinafter KERNER COMM’N REPORT].

2. Editor’s Note: The contributors to this symposium have used the terms “African American,” “black,” and “black American,” often interchangeably, in their articles. The *North Carolina Law Review* has elected to defer to its contributors’ choices in the absence of any universally accepted racial or ethnic designation.

3. KERNER COMM’N REPORT, *supra* note 1.

root causes, including economic restructuring, the suburban exodus, the Pentagon drain, redlining, and federal cutbacks. He also evaluates possible solutions, including investment in physical infrastructure, improvement of human infrastructure, and investment in urban neighborhoods.

The essays that follow explore the interrelation of "place" and "race." Jim Johnson (UNC Department of Geography) and Walter Farrell (University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Department of Education) cast further light on the historic, demographic, economic, and political context of the 1992 South Central Los Angeles riots, highlighting the changes in the years since the *Kerner Commission Report* in the racial and ethnic patterns in many of America's cities and the inevitable effect of economic opportunities on the viability of urban communities. George Galster (Urban Institute) examines more broadly the complex "opportunity structure" that shapes individual decisions, the interplay of race and place in creating permanent socioeconomic polarization, and the need for policies that focus specifically on race (such as anti-discrimination policies) and place (such as policies designed to expand housing options in the suburbs). Susan Fainstein (Rutgers University Department of Urban Planning and Policy Development) and Ann Markusen (Rutgers University Project on Regional & Industrial Economics) argue that place-based policies are crucial for a variety of reasons, but emphasize that such strategies cannot succeed without the integration of social and economic development policies and without restructuring urban policies to allocate appropriate responsibilities at the national, state, and local levels. John Calmore (Loyola-Los Angeles School of Law) challenges many traditional assumptions about the wisdom and feasibility of the "integration imperative," urging a paradigm shift to embrace "spatial equality" as an intermediate goal that honors the intangible quest for community by African Americans and acknowledges the lasting effects of historical patterns of racism in housing markets.

Other authors focus more specifically on particular areas of social policy, as in the original *Kerner Commission Report*. James Rosenbaum and his co-authors (Northwestern University Department of Education & Social Policy), Chester Hartman (Poverty and Race Research Action Council), Jack Boger (UNC School of Law), and Peter Salsich (St. Louis University School of Law) each propose different and far-reaching solutions to the nation's housing problems, both as a critical step in meeting the immediate needs of the nation's impoverished population as well as a mechanism for bringing about economic and social reform. Jim Rosenbaum discusses the success of Chicago's Gautreaux experiment, which has relied on a system of housing vouchers and brokered placements to assist poor, minority urban families to move within the city or to nearby

suburbs with better educational and employment opportunities. Chester Hartman discusses the need to face profound social and political issues if the national goal of providing decent housing for every family is to be met, and sketches the characteristics of an effective national public housing program. He stresses commitment to more substantial subsidies to close the gap between income and housing costs, recognition of the important role of nonprofit organizations in providing housing, and reexamination of the importance of home ownership and the role of investment-oriented objectives. Jack Boger suggests that the nation's tax system be modified, both to eliminate existing market incentives favoring segregation and to link interest and property tax deductions to communities' efforts to meet "fair share" objectives. Peter Salsich offers a critique of housing legislation and policy and suggests major reforms, including the imposition of a ceiling on mortgage interest tax deductions, the endowment of a low income housing investment trust fund, the establishment of permanently affordable housing, the revitalization of public housing through partnerships and cooperatives, and the integration of housing with economic development initiatives.

Other contributors propose reforming the nation's health, welfare, and educational systems. Sidney Watson (Mercer University School of Law) asks how we can improve Americans' health, taking into account that race, poverty, and geographic inaccessibility interact so that urban African Americans are more likely than other Americans to be unhealthy and in greater need of health care, but less likely to be able to afford or obtain such care. David Stoesz (San Diego State University Department of School of Social Work) explores the history of the nation's welfare system, arguing that because of its serious flaws it cannot be reformed readily, and that a new paradigm is needed which will foster economic empowerment and effective integration of public assistance and community development strategies. William Taylor (a civil rights lawyer based in Washington, D.C.) discusses the potential for educational reform as a means of improving the life chances of minority children born into poverty, focusing on the staying power of the idea of equality and the potential for early intervention through child development programs and public education policies such as school choice, school finance reform, and full funding of Head Start and professional development programs for teachers.

The symposium draws to a close with insights about key institutions that significantly affect the development and implementation of public policy regarding the poor, racial minorities, and the cities. Chuck Stone (UNC School of Journalism and Mass Communication) highlights the role of the media in shaping public perceptions about these important

subjects, outlines how the media's influence has changed in the last twenty-five years, and asserts that changing the role of African Americans in the media is imperative. Michael Stegman (UNC Department of City and Regional Planning) traces the history of national urban policies and argues that a new national urban policy is needed for the 1990s—one that links macro-level investment policies with community development strategies and reform of government institutions. The issue concludes with a final essay that seeks to distill key points drawn from the insights of our diverse contributors in these essays, as well as those provided by the contributors and other invited guests at a colloquium held in Chapel Hill on February 12-13, 1993.

This project has been a labor of love, and its sponsors hope that the ideas presented in this issue will stimulate greater attention toward improving the conditions in one of America's most vital treasures—its cities.

