

Foreword to the Symposium: The Urban Crisis

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THE URBAN CRISIS

FOREWORD

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The crisis in our cities is one of the most complex and challenging problems of our time. The rapid expansion of our metropolitan centers in the present century—the flow of population from rural America to our cities—has created pressures and counter-pressures which have become matters of concern, not only to the urban dwellers themselves but to our entire nation.

The rapid, equitable, and effective solution of the urban crisis is a priority goal of American government—national, state, and local. The nation's intellectual and financial resources are being mobilized to provide workable answers. We must, however, realize that time is running out—that the American people are looking for answers to these problems.

In this issue, the William and Mary Law Review has gathered together the views of a number of outstanding figures in government, education, and law. In their articles, they examine the nature of the urban crisis and some of the possible approaches for dealing with it. This type of enterprise is essential in our present circumstances. The last several years have revealed that no single approach is adequate for dealing with the highly complex and interrelated factors which, in their totality, comprise the urban crisis. My recent assignment as the Johnson-Humphrey Administration's liaison with the cities brought me into daily communication with mayors and city officials of hundreds of our municipalities. While many common problems existed, especially in the lack of an adequate revenue base to sustain needed municipal services, each city also had problems that were unique. And each city

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had its own thoughts about how these problems could be solved most effectively.

We are, then, entering a period of change and adaptation in our federal system. We must search for procedures and relationships which permit states and municipalities to find their own answers, even as the national government continues to provide urgently needed financial assistance and expertise. In the campaign I advocated the beginnings of a system of federal revenue sharing with states and municipalities and the creation of a National Urban Development Bank. These illustrate the kind of flexible new approaches which must be tried if we are to have the tools necessary to accomplish this mammoth undertaking.

As we develop and perfect these tools, let us always remember that government exists only to serve the people. This is more than a trite phrase extracted from a Fourth of July oration; it goes to the heart of all we are attempting to achieve in our struggle to renew our cities. Of course we are concerned that our cities embody the most creative elements of American architecture, that the physical structure of our cities reflects sound and efficient planning. But we must be equally cognizant of the human dimension in our plans and programs, especially as we develop policies and programs to meet human needs. The tendency in this computer age to depersonalize our governmental services must be resisted if people are to retain a sense of identification and faith in their democratic institutions.

Flexibility, an open mind, a willingness to experiment, and a commitment to building humanized institutions of democratic government are characteristics which are vital to ultimate success in surmounting our present difficulties. Some people have suggested that the urban crisis is the forerunner of the collapse of the American experiment in democracy and surely that potential exists. But I prefer to regard this crisis as America's greatest challenge and opportunity to prove to a doubting world that democracy is the wave of the future—even in this revolutionary age.

I know this is a big job—probably the biggest job ever undertaken by the American people. But I refuse to believe that we are not equal to this task. I refuse to believe that the American experiment is doomed. I do believe that our best days are yet to be lived.