

# LETTER FROM THE CHAIR

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Planners today face a world that has changed dramatically in about a decade. Since 2007, financial crisis and the Great Recession plunged markets across the globe into severe decline, with cities and their most vulnerable people still in recovery. Recurring natural disasters are reminders of the urgency of climate change, yet while much of the rest of the world has made commitments to address it, the United States remains in denial. The prevalence of killings of African Americans came to light through social media – at the hands of police in places like Ferguson, Baltimore, and Cleveland, and at the hands of a white supremacist in places like Charleston. School shootings far too often leave a nation numbed and frozen in inaction.

Planning students today are learning their craft within dangerously divisive national politics that openly denigrates women, stokes racial hatred and Islamophobia, vilifies immigrants, insults other nations whether friend or foe, and tolerates white supremacy. Many students are young enough that they don't even know a world without a global war on terror. Political leaders continue to assault the value of the public sector and heap scorn on the role of government in delivering collective goods. As if all this weren't troubling enough, public discourse is damaged beyond recognition. Sure, some politicians have long been dishonest, but never has our nation seen such brazen use of outright lies as a daily tactic of policy making.

How should aspiring planners respond to such damaging shifts as they enter this uncertain terrain? Planners have much to offer. They're good at making linkages across disciplines and perspectives, at enabling democratic decision making through broad participation, at collecting evidence and bringing knowledge into action, and – with a profession that has embraced an ethical commitment to social justice – they're obligated to address diverse needs and promote a fair distribution of benefits.

And planners are good at advancing open dialogue with the critical issues of the day. This volume of *Agora* shows how a new generation of planners is eager to accept the challenge of bringing fundamental change to a world that desperately needs it. You'll learn about innovations that range in locale and scale from a single block in Ann Arbor to sprawling informal settlements in Mumbai, and in topics that span from strengthening economic development tools to dismantling racial restrictive deed covenants. Today as much as ever, we need planners engaging in critical public discourse. Thanks to the authors and editors for another inspiring volume of *Agora*. And congratulations on continuing the tradition that just last year was recognized with a Douglas Haskell Award for Student Journals.

**Joe Grengs**

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