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*editor-in-chief, master of urban planning, 2015*

"Divisions" emerged as a theme while the staff of *Agora* rounded out the selection for *Agora 9* on a chalkboard in a Taubman classroom one January morning, after hours of review and discussion about submissions. As a group, we saw how the selected pieces focused on social, economic, and political inequities and barriers.

Last year, we more gradually came upon the theme "Alternatives" for *Agora 8* as we edited piece after piece presenting an innovative strategy planners could employ to bring about change in our cities. Together, the articles inspired hopefulness in readers – a sense of our ability to institute better, sounder policies and ideas in our practice.

While such hope is not too naïve or lost, events of 2014 in cities across the United States and the world serve as stark reminders of the age-old barriers that urban dwellers and planners face. Incidents of police brutality against black Americans in the United States spurred protest and discussion about race relations; protests regarding the World Cup in Brazil shone a spotlight

on the country's disconnect between political goals and the needs of the large section of the population living in poverty. These events, and countless more, reveal deep cuts in our society that influence and shape urban development.

*Agora 9* tells stories about some of the divisions and challenges embedded in our cities. A number of pieces critique how housing policies, laws, and planning decisions create segregation along racial and economic lines in the United States. Two pieces explore more effective, successful strategies for addressing these issues, complementing the pointed critiques. Others explore social divides in cities and countries across the world, providing valuable insight into how divisions manifest in varied cultural contexts. The addition of content types including photojournalism, conceptual design, and spatial analysis expands the perspectives through which readers can understand and reflect upon these stories and issues.

In Symposium 001, four short articles confront the relationship between planning and police brutality, responding to the tragic events that brought police brutality to the forefront of our national consciousness this year. They address important questions about the role of planning in constructing spaces where police brutality occurs and what we, as planners, can do about it in the future. We present four different perspectives to ignite discussion of various aspects of this timely, vital issue in planning.

Planning strategies that foster participation and consensus building, such as those explored in *Agora 8*, can work to break down barriers dividing our cities, but we must remember that these barriers cast long shadows. Addressing issues related to racial and ethnic prejudice and economic inequality requires us to simultaneously look forward and backward – we must acknowledge how we created these divides before we can repair them. More importantly, we must recognize how we are currently enabling systems of oppression to endure in urban landscapes, whether through policies, patterns of development, or other mechanisms.

I would like to recognize all of our authors for their hard work, patience, and, most importantly, valuable contributions to written thought and discussion in our department and beyond. Thanks to them and the dedication of our remarkable editors, creative staff, and faculty advisors, Dr. Scott Campbell and Dr. Julie Steiff, *Agora 9* contains pieces that confront seemingly overwhelming “wicked problems” in planning in a way that demonstrates thorough analysis of and deep passion for the issues at hand. Finally, I invite you, a reader, to become a writer: use the space we provide at the end of this volume to reflect on the ideas discussed and explore how to overcome these barriers.

Best wishes,

**ALEXANDRA MARKIEWICZ**