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## Introduction

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## INTRODUCTION

During the past several years, our nation's commitment to the poor and to the causes of civil rights and civil liberties has been severely tested. In each of these areas of concern, advocates for progressive policies are facing immense challenges.

In the midst of economic stagnation and rising unemployment, major cutbacks in social welfare legislation have been enacted. Public housing, food stamp, AFDC, child nutrition, and employment programs have been drastically curtailed. At the same time, major tax legislation has provided disproportionate relief for the rich.

Similarly, in key aspects of civil rights enforcement, the executive branch of the federal government has retreated from policies of vital importance to minorities and women. Prior commitments to affirmative action, equal employment opportunities, and integrated education are either being thwarted by direct attack or by lax enforcement.

The fanaticism of radical right ideologues and their "moral majority" colleagues has brought about numerous civil liberties confrontations on a wide range of social issues. The right wing has sought: to reverse the Supreme Court's abortion decisions, to require the teaching of creationism, to ban provocative books from school libraries and curricula, and to ordain prayers in the nation's classrooms.

These challenges occur at a time when legal resources for impoverished communities are being reduced. Most significantly, funding for legal services programs has been reduced by 25 percent—a cutback that has been exacerbated by unfunded increases in the costs of delivering legal services for the poor.

Thus, legal workers involved in anti-poverty, civil rights, and/or civil liberties work are facing serious challenges that need to be carefully assessed. Their work, at this juncture, appears to be mainly defensive. An agenda to recapture the offensive—to ensure progress for vulnerable constituencies and to increase respect for basic constitutional rights—must be developed.

This was the purpose of the Antioch School of Law's Colloquium on Poverty, Civil Rights, and Civil Liberties Law in the 1980's. The Colloquium brought together many of the leading practitioners of poverty, civil rights, and civil liberties law—an event which energized those attending with thoughtful strategies and surprising optimism.

I am pleased that the ANTIOCH LAW JOURNAL's Editorial Board has selected some of the Colloquium's presentations for inclusion in the *Journal's* second issue. It is further verification that the *Journal* is dedicated both to scholarship and progressive social change.

RONALD F. POLLACK  
Dean

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