



# Final Thoughts

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In fall of 1977, my family settled in Garden Grove, California after fleeing a war in our homeland of Vietnam. My parents and their eight kids crammed into a three-bedroom ranch home in a typical post-war California suburb. The wafting smell of fish sauce and boisterous voices of Vietnamese children were not a welcomed addition to this middle-class neighborhood. The tensions over U.S. involvement in Vietnam still inflicted raw angry emotions from neighbors. Our Asian faces were a reminder of enemy combatants and a war recently lost. We fell victim to harsh and overt discrimination – derogatory words were spray painted on our house, my siblings and I were taunted and beaten, and an attempted home invasion by white supremacists was deterred by rapid police response.

While there was constant terror in my home and neighborhood, school became my sanctuary. School was where I felt safe, nurtured, and accepted. Starting school at the age of five, I learned the English language and my education became my path to integration. In school, my cultural diversity was celebrated and where I felt comfortable showing my kindergarten classmates how to pick up yarn with chopsticks during show and tell. My experience is a testament that every child has the right to an education, no matter what color their skin, if they are citizens or not, or even if they have two female parents. The schools I attended are institutions that accept diversity, foster tolerance for difference, and offer opportunities for individuals who come from every socioeconomic stratosphere.

The same cannot be said for our institutions of planning. Unfortunately, planning has a checkered history – one riddled with decisions that benefit wealthy elites and hurt those who are the most disenfranchised. Think: urban renewal. Though you don't even have to look that far back in history. Highway projects and landfill sitings continue to disproportionately affect low-income minority neighborhoods. Local government officials, still, shamefully dodge their responsibility to provide basic services to poor, distressed, minority neighborhoods.

Planning or policy decisions do not have to be overtly manipulative or discriminatory to have unequal outcomes. Most of the time, it's the unaware planner that rubberstamps projects because they fit within the regulatory regime. By not being cognizant and concerned about the most disadvantaged, planners are complicit in propping up the

institutions and structures that perpetuate inequality and injustice.

This is not to say that all planners do not care about diversity and inequality. We have our equity planning heroes, Paul Davidoff, Norm Krumholz, and the planners, advocates, and activists working in the trenches, tirelessly and with little pay, to right the wrongs of our past. It's just that there are not enough of them. When we look at the pressing complex social problems or demographic shifts in American society, all trends point toward the need for more heterogeneity within the planning profession – both in the academy and in the field. If we want to attract a diversity of students and faculty to the planning profession, we must show them that our field is no longer dominated by white elites.

Instead of dwelling on what's lacking, I want to turn instead to what can be done about our failure to diversify the planning profession. For example, how can we infuse a diversity of ideas, people, and decisions in planning to have a more just society? It begins with having a commitment to diversity in everything we do—in our teaching, research, and practice. We will never achieve diversity if it is merely a grassroots initiative or just a top-down administrative mandate. Rather, it would be much more effective to harness the energy of grassroots mobilization and the power of administrators to change institutional practices that have lasting effects. We will never achieve diversity if only a few faculty members teach about diversity in the classroom; every faculty member must do so. We need to be comfortable talking about our shortcomings and work towards creating a more hospitable environment for people from all walks of life in the academy, workplace, and communities.

As a planner, I envision cities as places that offer what schools were for me when I was five years old: social and physical spaces where everyone feels safe, nurtured, and accepted. We need to create inclusive cities that celebrate diversity while at the same time ensuring that the celebration opens the doors to equal opportunities for housing mobility, education attainment and labor force participation. Planners are uniquely positioned to contribute to creating more diverse and socially just cities because we look at the interrelatedness of local decision-making and think long-term. Planning for diversity and equity should be central to what we do and who we are.