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# ARTICLES

## INTRODUCTION

Ralph R. Smith\*

The fortieth president of the United States has changed the political landscape. Much more so than any of his immediate predecessors, Ronald Wilson Reagan has dictated the content and scope of the nation's social, economic and political agenda. If he succeeds in his reelection bid, his platform could well be the nation's agenda for decades to come. Even if he does not serve a second term, he has left his mark by setting in motion forces that will not easily be reversed.

One area in which President Reagan has moved forcefully and effectively comes under the rubric of new federalism. Briefly described, new federalism seeks to alter the previously evolving relationship between the federal and state governments by reducing the size and scope of the federal government and turning increased responsibility and unrestricted funds and numerous programs over to state government.

No realignment of political power and responsibility of the magnitude being proposed could be accomplished without considerable impact on the real condition and aspirations of black Americans, other people of color and those who are on the bottom rungs of the socio-economic ladder. Even within and among these groups, however, there is considerable ambivalence and a genuine debate over the issue of new federalism. To the groups for whom the not so good old days are still too painful to forget, today's new federalism sounds very much like yesteryear's "states' rights." For those who believe that the realization of actual political power on the local level will bring the promise of real influence on the state level, new federalism might offer a pragmatic alternative to the amorphousness of continued national consciousness-raising by often competing "movements."

Even if it is too soon to tell whether it is the old wine/new bottle or real politic point of view that is the more prophetic, it is quite timely to consider many of the issues raised and the questions posed by the papers of Professors Barnett, Greene, and Thelwell. These papers originally were presented less than one year after President Reagan was inaugurated and shortly before his administration elaborated on the new federalism theme he had struck during the campaign and in his inaugural address. Rather than being dated by events occurring in the two years between presentation and publication, the theses and arguments in all three papers are as timely today as they were in January 1982. This fact attests to the perceptiveness of Profes-

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sors Barnett, Greene and Thelwell and it reflects well on the Section on Minority Groups of the Association of American Law Schools.

In 1980, the Section on Minority Groups broke with tradition and had as its major presenter a scholar from a discipline other than law. Nationally renown sociologist, Professor William Julius Wilson presented a paper discussing the thesis advanced in his widely, publicized book *The Declining Significance of Race*. The reaction to this presentation laid the groundwork for a presentation by Dr. William Darity, an economist whose paper, "The Managerial Elite," was equally well received. The papers of Professors Wilson and Darity were published in Volume 7, Number 1 of the *Black Law Journal*. With publication of these three articles, the *Black Law Journal* and the Section on Minority Groups continue a collaboration that constitutes a major contribution toward scholarship and the advancement of knowledge within the black legal community.