FOREWORD

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Let me tell you a story about the city I love.

New Orleans, like all American cities, was segregated in the mid-twentieth century by discriminatory policies like racial zoning and redlining. The Federal Housing Administration (FHA), in particular, was known to insure loans exclusively for white households. In 1954, Mayor deLesseps S. Morrison asked the FHA to make an exception. There was a shortage of housing units where Black households were allowed to live, and Mayor Morrison wasn't about to let them move into white neighborhoods. So he made a deal with the FHA: if the FHA insured a construction loan for a new Black housing development, he would make sure it remained completely segregated from the FHA-insured white development next door.

The NAACP protested the mayor's segregationist plan, but it only made Morrison proud that he had angered them. An FHA spokesman likewise bragged that this segregated project was "the type of thing [the] FHA wanted." He said this *to* African Americans.

The year 1954 was also when my father, Ernest N. Morial, became the first African American graduate of the law school at Louisiana State University. He spent the next twenty years fighting segregationist policies like Mayor Morrison's, and in 1977, my father succeeded in becoming mayor himself. If I learned one thing from his time in the courtroom, it is the lesson that injustice and intolerance do not dissipate without a fight. They hang on, gripping tightly to their power, until the almighty force of law compels them to desist.

It is a lesson I have been reliving in our current political environment.

The chapters in this book tell the story of the Fair Housing Act of 1968: what it is, why it was needed, how it was interpreted, whom it has helped, and where it has failed us—or perhaps more accurately, where *we* have failed

it. The chapters paint a compelling portrait of a country still at war with the demons that my father's generation set out to vanquish. We have made great progress since those early days. Explicit discrimination is outlawed, and by some measures, segregation has decreased somewhat. But the persistent chasm between the races—in economic opportunity, in social stature, in health and safety, in public opinion—is impossible to deny. The legacy of our nation's sins is on display for all to see.

Where my generation has fallen short, new leaders are beginning to take charge. I am inspired by the young men and women I see protesting, running for office, and demanding equality. I have always believed that a hallmark of leadership is optimism, and I see that hopeful quality in the leaders of tomorrow. But a leader also needs a roadmap. She has to know how we got to where we are, what has worked and what hasn't, and which tools are available to her going forward. This book provides such a road map, and the Fair Housing Act offers one important tool kit.

It may seem, from today's media coverage and political statements, that "housing" ranks low on the list of priorities. Rarely does one hear the word spoken in presidential debates or posted on placards in public demonstrations. But I would argue—and the facts in this book would bear me out—that housing is the foundation that underlies most, if not all, of our current racial divides.

As my friend Raphael Bostic likes to say, housing is a platform. It is the foundation on which we build our lives, our careers, our communities, and our democracy. Housing is a conduit to jobs, to health care, to public safety, and to social interaction. When we segregate our housing, we cut our citizens off from one another. We splinter the bonds that move us forward as one nation. Is it any surprise, after fifty-plus years living in two worlds physically apart from one another, that we seem unable to find common ground, trust collective institutions, or elect politicians with compassion, with empathy, and with respect for all their constituents? The rot of our body politic did not come from the top and work its way down. On the contrary, we instilled it in our homes, and it eroded us from within. Let this be a warning to all who seek to mend the fractures that cleave our land in two: only by living among one another can our spirits truly be joined as one.

I have seen this transformation in my own city in recent years. I am proud to say I lived to see something my father never imagined, when the Civil War monuments erected to subjugate his generation and his father's before him came tumbling down, and the people of New Orleans turned their eyes at

long last away from Confederate ghosts of the past toward the diverse opportunity of the future. Though we have not yet vanquished the ghosts of segregation in the same fashion, the progress we have made would make our ancestors proud, and they would advise us to do as they did: turn our eyes toward the future and steel ourselves for the fight ahead, until at long last the almighty force of law compels fairness, justice, and tolerance to triumph.