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Professor john a. powell is an internationally recognized authority in the areas of civil rights and civil liberties and a wide range of issues including race, structural racialization, housing, poverty and democracy. He is Executive Director of the Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity at The Ohio State University and he holds the Gregory H. Williams Chair in Civil Rights & Civil Liberties at the University's Michael E. Moritz College of Law.

Professor powell has written extensively on issues related to structural racism, racial justice and regionalism, concentrated poverty and urban sprawl, opportunity based housing, voting rights, affirmative action in the United States, South Africa and Brazil, racial and ethnic identity, spirituality and social justice, and the needs of citizens in a democratic society.

Previously, he founded and directed the Institute on Race and Poverty at the University of Minnesota. He also served as Director of Legal Services of Greater Miami and was National Legal Director of the American Civil Liberties Union where he was instrumental in developing educational adequacy theory.

Professor powell has worked and lived in Africa, where he was a consultant to the governments of Mozambique and South Africa. He has also lived and worked in India and done work in South America and Europe. He is one of the co-founders of the Poverty & Race Research Action Council and serves on the board of several national organizations. Professor powell has taught at numerous law schools including Harvard and Columbia University. He joined the faculty at The Ohio State University in 2002.