

Urban Renewal: People, Politics and Planning, Part II

By Prof. McKinley Burt

I was delighted to find that so many remember that 1970's course I taught at Portland State University: Black or Urban Economic Experience. A three-quarter course, whose home was the School of Urban Planning, Black Studies Department, proved of a superior design and ended up being cross listed in the school catalog under a number of other disciplines (only after discovery by students).

This interactive spread extended to three additional departments or disciplines, sociology, business and economics. As you will see from this series I had incorporated into my design thirty years of realistic urban experience that no textbook or academic discourse would reveal; the range was from accounting, real estate broker and property owner to federal programs, businessman and a parent with a child in the failing education system.

By the second quarter registration day, the line before my faculty registration table in the gym was

exceeded only by that epitome of 'bonehead' courses, "Econ 101", I could read the minds of those handling registration at other tables when at first they stared uncomprehending: "what" in the world are all those white folks doing at Burt's table?

By the third quarter, word had spread throughout the school that my course delivered the most comprehensive data base and operational understanding of the urban scene anywhere north of the Berkeley Campus (just as found weekly in these pages). By the start of the second year, the class had expanded to a lecture hall, and a second off-campus site to accommodate the managers from industry and those from city, state and federal government--and from social programs. In the same year I added the Vice President of Urban Affairs for the U.S. National Bank as my teaching assistant (Conrad Rosing).

A special section of the first quarter was a documentation of a long-established (if well hidden) skill level and technical ability of African Americans. The white personnel

people from industry jumped on this with both feet for it gave them needed support when confronting their bosses with the necessity for some positive action in the area of Affirmative action. I can remember executives (students) from United Parcel, Forest Service, Bonneville, foundries etc., staying after class and asking for special guidance. And I will remember some black students in the class who now have excellent positions because they met the right executive in the class and were hired within the week.

The same connection made between the low earnings of minorities and their hidden abilities in technology piqued the interest of U.S. Forest Service personnel who gave me a contract to travel all over the Northwest from Alaska to the California border, conducting workshops aimed at overcoming the hiring prejudices of hard core personnel. This worked very well and resulted in the hiring of qualified minority personnel where they had never worked before--at places they had never even heard of, good paying jobs as secre-

taries, truck drivers, surveyors, engineers etc.

As a further indication of what a competent and thorough evaluation of the urban elements of "people, politics and planning can accomplish, we note that my monthly sojourns around the Pacific Northwest Became A traveling University. My workshops had sufficient contact hours to award credit hours in personnel administration from Anchorage to Klamath Falls and from Spokane to Gold Beach or to Redmond (too bad 'Air Oregon' didn't have frequent flyer goodies).

Another fortunate spinoff was that rural peoples and education districts got a new slant on urban problems of race, employment and politics, since local people would hear of the Forest Service experience and invite me back to speak at schools, granges and public meetings. Next week: "The great 'Light Rail Scam'; General Motors and the bus companies changed the urban landscape and our pocket-books.

Coleman To Lead Children's Services

A new administrator will guide the state's Children's Services Division in the Portland area.

Lee Coleman, 37, will be responsible for five branch offices, supervising 341 employees and overseeing a \$60 million budget. The branches offer child protective services, foster care, family therapy, counseling, parent training, adoption, residential treatment and other services.

The position was held by Kay Toran who now is the chief state administrator for CSD.

Coleman said she's excited about working in the agency's metropolitan region.

Coleman had served on the Oregon Parole Board. She previously was an administrator with the Oregon Liquor Control Commission and has been a self-employed mediator for family, divorce and business disputes.

Coleman received law and bachelor's degrees from the University of Oregon, Eugene, where she majored in public administration. She taught one term at Northwestern School of Law, Portland, and was the affirmative action director for the Oregon State Bar Association.

Before moving to Oregon in 1977, Coleman lived in Arizona. She is divorced with two children ages eight and four.



Lee Coleman is the new administrator of Oregon Children's Services Division in the Portland area.

AFRICA INSIGHT Africans Our Africa

Africa sadly stands alone, an understood continent. Its cultures and her traditions, often, sadly are misrepresented by the western media. Gory pictures of hungry babies and faces of poverty are beamed to an ignorant world. Imperfect patches of some cultures or traditions are played and replayed. The fears and frustrations of Africa, often, also glorify pages of newspapers. Rarely are we told that there is something good coming out of the continent.

My Africa-America colleague in the office is concerned, so also are others wanting to know the relationship between traditions and cultures and the condition of life.

It is not always easy to define anything about Africa in one cultural context, but I will attempt to explain some of the questions that probably would clear some misconceptions.

Africa like Europe is a conglomerate of different cultures and tribes each with different traditions and ethnic make-ups. Like in Europe, ethnic wrangling and chaos contin-

ued to surfaced in Africa. Each African culture is unique and easily distinguished. Attempts to impose one culture on another has always been the bane of Africa civil wars. What happens in Somalia or the famine in Ethiopia has no direct bearings in Nigeria. Just like the Germans are different from the Irish or Swiss from the Dutch, so also is the Swahili different from the Ashantis.

Many folks perhaps have been misinformed to believe that Africa is converged in wars and wretchedness. Come to think of it, millions were murdered in Bosnia and also many were killed in Somalia and Rwanda. While there is poverty in some parts of Europe, so also is there poverty in Africa. The difference has

media portrayal of Africa as a land of death and despondency while carefully carving out fancy words to describe the horrors in other parts of the world.

I agree that Africa is in dire need of a technological leap. It is true that it needs help from foreign nations. It is a legitimate request, considering the fact that most of these nations had forced and raped her of her natural resources during the colonial era.

Africa nations are covered in natural resources, gold in Ghana, petroleum in Nigeria and uranium in South Africa.

Africa in some parts glow in beauty. It is a part of the mother earth that has nature unalloyed. For a while, forget the catastrophe in Rwanda and in Somalia and behold the animal reserve in Zaire, Africa.

(Promise King was born in Nigeria. He has worked for local and foreign Media, and is a staff writer for the Portland Observer.)



By Promise King

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