

# The Future Of Urban Education

## An Urban Futurist's Perspective from 1888 to 1999... and Beyond.

By **LYBROAN JAMES**

Someone once said that it is hard to predict the future, particularly since it has yet to happen. I do not remember who said it. Nevertheless, I think I heard it at a black education conference in Los Angeles about five years ago.

At the time, I was fresh out of UCLA and a brand new high school math teacher. I too thought, like my contemporaries and elder educators, that we could only influence the future, but definitely not predict or direct it. In terms of educating black youth, the only thing that I could predict was that they were doomed to go the way of the Native Americans if things continued on the current path.

That was then, and this is now. As an experienced mathematician and an Urban Futurist, I now know that you CAN predict the future...and with amazing accuracy.

When I speak of predicting the future, I am referring to a scientific process using history, mathematics and logic. And unlike any other time in history, we have the tools (the Internet, multimedia, film and new technology) to increase our accuracy of projections, and to actually create better future years in advance. We also have, as a template, the fortune of being able to view the cause and effect relationships that have shaped our education over the last 100 years.

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### Why Educators need to be Futurists

As educators, community leaders, mentors and role models, we are the greatest influences on our youth and the future of our communities. Often times our thinking becomes confined to what "was" or what "is", rather than "what can be." As futurists, our purpose is to discover or invent, examine and evaluate probable and preferable futures. Through this process, we create ideal scenarios of the future, then work backwards to where we are today.

Let us suspend our current thinking, beliefs and views of "education", and enter a parallel world where we travel back in time, then zoom into the future through a portal known as the Black Box.

### 1888: The Original African-American Thinkers and Educators

During this time, Black people had been out of slavery for about twenty-five years. They were the most innovative and skilled people in the country. They had built buildings, constructed roads, farmed land and participated in every aspect of infrastructure development. It was this period that produced our greatest thinkers such as Frederick Douglas, W.E.B.

DuBois and Dr. William McDonald. It was also the first time that Black people in America were able to educate themselves and apply that education without interference. The results: the development of Rosewood in Florida, the creation of "Black Wall Street" in Oklahoma and the founding of the historically black colleges.

This was the most prominent time in Black history. It was a time when we viewed education - its purpose and delivery in its most effective context. Since we were forced to be self-reliant, we strategically studied the American systems, then copied them (just as the Japanese did after World War II).

### 20<sup>th</sup> Century: Education...or Miseducation?

As we entered the 20<sup>th</sup> century as successful contributors in fields such as science, mathematics, law, business and the Arts, we came upon four "mental monsters": Jim Crow laws, racism, integration and Affirmative Action.

The Western education that black people fought for has produced a generation that may be better off individually, but is much worse off collectively. It appears that we now look to become "educated" so that we can "escape" our communities and move into other communities. However, if you were to study most other ethnic groups,

they pursue education so that they can bring that knowledge and expertise back to their community.

This cycle of mis-directed education explains why public schools in urban communities are struggling to provide a safe, quality, competitive education. The following scenario gives an overview of this vicious cycle.

"Urban communities fight to send their kids to Western schools. Once there, the students adopt the dominant Western culture (individualism, materialism, status and working for a major corporation). While in school, the student struggles to dismiss the label of "Affirmative Action" by assimilating into the dominant culture, further separating from his/her community. Upon graduation, they either move out of their community or live there and work outside of it, giving the corporation and its community the best of their brainpower.

Because of the lack of businesses in urban communities, they have fewer tax dollars to put into education and the youth have few role models and mentors to help them prepare for the future."

### 1999 to 2020: Do You See What I See?

#### Digital Villages and Cyberschools

As we zoom to the year 2020, we notice how beautiful it is, because no one is there! It is a future just waiting to be constructed. There is no one

there in our way. There are none of the "monsters" that exist in the past. Being free to create, and knowing what we know about the past 100 years, we design the ideal educational system for our urban communities; an educational system that produces great minds that build the community and creates alliances with other communities.

In the year 2020, the urban educational system uses the latest technology, such as the Internet, videoconferencing, e-mail, plasma screens and multimedia. These tools are used to create cyberschools where students take courses from around the world, receiving the best training in the sciences, literature, Arts and history. Students collaborate and learn within their communities while benefiting from the resources and information shared through networks, previously restricted for the few. And they are also free to explore a world they once believed ended at the freeway on-ramp.

This new education system also allows urban youth to participate in apprenticeship programs after school, allowing them to develop communication skills and character before entering college or the workforce. Barriers to opportunities are erased, creating a level playing field. Teachers remain current through "just-in-time" professional development programs and are able to self-publish learning materials for



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use by students throughout the world.

Now that urban communities are fully integrated into the global educational environment, they are positioned to profit from the packaging and distribution of their intellectual properties and creativity. This would be similar to the way corporate America profits from the talents of urban youth in the areas of sports and entertainment, only now the urban communities would benefit from the fruits of their talents and labor.

Time up. Welcome back to 1999. I hope you enjoyed your trip through time, from 1888 to 2020. No matter what the time period, education is crucial to the survival and development of any community. For urban communities, the key to future success lies in controlling the educational system that educates its youth, and to use technology to acquire the resources and information that will allow us to compete in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## Building the Corporation of the Future

By **TONIA McDONALD**

In the year 2020 and beyond, companies without a global communications business-to-business strategy to run their business may not survive.

Businesses that were not nurtured in an incubation support system, nor partnered in an interactive cooperative environment with at least 50 other small business clusters - were doomed to die away.

### What is a Cluster?

A Cluster is a term interchangeable with incubator. Clusters are geographic or virtual concentrations of interconnected companies and institutions in a particular field. Clusters encompass an array of linked industries and other entities important to competition.

Clusters promote both competition and cooperation. Rivals compete intensely to win and retain customers. Without vigorous competition, a cluster will not succeed. Yet there is also cooperation, much of it vertical, involving companies in related industries and local institutions. Competition can coexist with cooperation because they occur on different dimensions and among different players.

The Small Business Administration (SBA) reports that an average of 9 out of 10 businesses will fail by the end of the first year. In fact, about 80% of all small businesses fail if not properly nurtured inside of an incubator, collaborative, or consortium.

**In incubators, small businesses succeed up to 95% of the time - if they share the costs of doing business with other small businesses in a nurturing, cooperative environment.** An entrepreneur knows he/she must attract others willing to pool their

resources and talents to collectively succeed. Entrepreneurs' partner with others, take risks and invests in new ideas.

Research shows that the future success of any business depends on member-owned alliances that create and collaborate in a networked economy.

Clusters are conducive to new business formation for a variety of reasons. Individuals working within a cluster can more easily perceive gaps in products or services around which they can build businesses. Beyond that, barriers to entry are lower than elsewhere.

Needed assets, skills, inputs and staff are often readily available at the cluster location, waiting to be assembled into a new enterprise. Local financial institutions and investors, already familiar with the cluster, may require a lower risk premium capital.

In addition, the cluster often presents a significant local market, and an entrepreneur may benefit from established relationships. All of these factors reduce the perceived risks of entry - and of exit, should the enterprise fail.

Few people who label themselves "entrepreneurs" actually are. Why? Nine out of ten entrepreneurs and self-employed people interviewed in the last ten years were unwilling to share costs with others in going into business.



Tonia McDonald, Urban Futurist.

They also lacked trust for each other in the sharing the cost of rent and equipment. People are so unsure about the future that they revert to their old methods of business, i.e., stealing information, working under false pretenses.

Thinking about the future and how companies and institutions fit in is an obvious necessity for long term success. However, thinking about a collective future and observing the causes and events leading up to it, have barely begun to be studied and therefore if largely unpredictable.

A successful consortium, collaborative, collective and economic engine acts as a successful business cluster or incubator. Through membership fees, corporations, educational institutions, small and mid-sized businesses have access to shared, discounted services, joint ventures and joint costs of research and development.

Pooling talents, money, risk and rewards is a small price to pay to join a group that is moving forward in business success.

The number of African-American owned businesses in the United States increased 46 percent, from 424,165 to 620,912, between 1987 and 1992. Receipts for these firms rose 63 percent during this span, from \$19.8 billion to \$32.2 billion. The total number of firms in the United States increased 26 percent, to 17.3 million; their receipts grew 67 percent, to \$3 trillion.

Nearly 3 million or 15 percent of African Americans, ages 25 and over, held a bachelor's degree or higher in 1998; of these degree-holders, more than 800,000 had an advanced degree.  
The number of African Americans under 35 who were enrolled in college in 1996 (1.5 million) was nearly 40 percent higher than the number enrolled a decade earlier. Similarly, African American nursery-school enrollment doubled over the same period, to 702,000.

The  
Portland Development Commission  
and its staff  
would like to salute  
the contributions that  
Black Americans  
have made to this  
great nation of ours.

The Portland Development Commission works to bring together community resources to achieve a vital economy with healthy neighborhoods and quality jobs for all citizens. The Commission is committed to working with the community to make our city a better place to live for all Portlanders.

