

11.947 Race, Immigration, and Planning

Session 2 Lecture Notes:

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In regard to the reading distributed during session 1: "Guide for the Mexican Migrant," is that a useful way to deal with the problem of immigration? To provide a guide that helps protect community residents who choose to participate in a risky, illegal endeavor?

On Feb 9, 2005, an article appeared in the NY Times about this guide. "The Everymigrant's Guide to Crossing the Border Illegally" by Charlie LeDuff and J. Emilio Flores presented skepticism toward the effort from the perspective of US government officials who claim that the government is supporting and encouraging an illegal activity and from illegal immigrants living in Los Angeles who dismissed it as useless because it is an outsider's perspective.

At the same time that the Mexican government is addressing the "reality" of border-crossings, vigilante groups such as The Minutemen, a group that patrols Border States in the US are stepping up their efforts to prevent illegal immigrants from entering the county. The Minute Men have called for a huge congregation on April 1st in Arizona to camp out on border for a week and help the border control.

Planning

Lawrence Bobo poses a question at the beginning of his article: Is a neutral planning possible?

- He then argues that there is no neutral planning; that it is a fallacy to think that you can make plans that don't shut some people out.

Susan Fainstein outlines a few different models from which to approach planning:

- Communicative Model: engaging stakeholders, seven-step model, process driven
- The New Urbanism: coming in with a set of tools for design.
- The Just City: A sociological model that emphasizes political economies and power relationships.
 - The Just City model is the closest approximation to the real work of planning because it takes into account the need for relationship building.

What skills do planners need in order to enter a community?

- Active listening

- Open mindedness

Different types of listening are often employed by planning professionals:

- Intentional Listening: David Rusk, the former mayor of Albuquerque advocates this when he says that you need to listen so you can explain rules and plans to people who don't understand. You listen for the intention of getting your own point across.
- Mediation Listening: This is the type of listening that allows a planner to pull together stakeholders and negotiate the rules and plans. Robert Dahl, from New Haven advocated for this type of listening in his book *Who governs?* But this type of listening does not allow voices of those people not considered stakeholders to be heard.
- Open Mindedness: This mode suggests that decisions always incomplete, revisable, and it acknowledges that all efforts are partial. There is no such thing as a genuine "universal." There are always people, things, and ideas, on the outside; there are always remainders.
 - People who defend universalism are silent about its remainders.
One example: Health Insurance
Everybody advocates for universal health insurance, but the reality is that universal health care would be deeply discriminatory. Studies have shown that there is no difference in the number of times that African Americans with insurance and African Americans without insurance go to the doctor. Not all communities have equal health care infrastructures, and those without do not get preventative care whether they have health insurance or not.

Language

Visual Language:

Consider the front-page image on an issue of the New York Globe magazine: it is an image of a white man (Harry Spencer) with the caption: "Can this man save public housing?"

- Is the image of urban planning one in which that picture serves as a symbol? Is the model for the professional planner to go to school, get tools, come out and go improve people's lives in other places?

Verbal Language:

Virtually all communication makes references that are culturally specific that you won't notice unless you are highly sensitive to them. Every group, people, culture has their own set of myths or "stock stories." One example of this in the United States is the Horatio Alger stories, in which characters would "pull themselves up by their bootstraps" and serve as an example for finding success in America.

The Language of Planning: Art vs. Science

The term "common denominator," commonly used in discussions about coalition building and politics, is a *mathematical* term that suggests that commonalities already exist and that we just need to find them; that we should just talk about the things that we have in common. This is the approach of universalism, and the emphasis is on reduction. Such language is "repressive" because often the preexisting commonalities are based on a historical reference and exclude new ideas and identities. In reality, politics is about creating new connections or "bridgeheads," a term taken from literary criticism, between essentially different entities with no preexisting points of commonality.

Planning is fundamentally about politics and not economics. People have incommensurate interests. You cannot always find commonality and you cannot always reach agreement because often there is no commonality. Politics is the *art* of bringing those interests together. You need to change the way people think about things. You have to get people to look at situations from entirely different points of view.

Planners need to think and be creative about how to deal with all the nuances of the people involved in the planning process. Building coalitions and dealing with issues of difference requires research deep into the Other and then working hard to imagine how different groups can come together in an alliance.

- The Other is not always a unitary particular thing that you can get to know. What is the other that you are getting to know? At some point, particularly in really diverse communities, looking to gain mastery of all the points and histories and peoples is impossible.

The planner gives images of what a community is much the way a painter creates an image of a landscape. Both are producing a very powerful aesthetic that influences the lens of those who encounter the result. That is creative, art.

Justice in Planning

Can a "Just City" really exist? Is it something we can identify and prove exists?

If we come to the table with a specific idea about what community needs are and where priorities should lie without an open mind, we run the risk of alienating the people we are trying to help. When Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was asked what the most basic need in communities is, he said "Love."

Immigrant Communities

These issues become really important in relation to immigrant communities because often, when we talk about our visions of a Just City, we aren't talking about immigrants.

How does this conversation deal with immigrant populations that are difficult to track?

What are the dominant images of immigrants in American society?

Race and Immigration

There are a growing number of writers claiming that immigrants are a threat to society, as we know it. A number of conservative authors have raised alarm about unregulated flows across the border. The fact that they don't know how many immigrants are in this country is cause for great alarm. The INS was heavily criticized in Congress and merged into the Department of Homeland Security.

An article appeared in the New York Times on Tuesday, February 8, "Asylum Seekers Treated Poorly, U.S. Panel Says" by Nina Bernstein and Mark Santora about what happens to immigrants who come to the US looking for political asylum. It was surprising: when it comes to immigrants asking for asylum in Texas, 85% are released immediately. In NJ, over 95% are imprisoned indefinitely. In New York, Queens, 8% are released. The article didn't account for why. It may be a question of volume asylum requests received and familiarity with the country of origin. The article did talk a lot about Florida and the difference between the treatment of Haitians and Cubans. (A second article reviewing the treatment of asylum seekers at airports appeared on Thursday, Feb. 10 "Airports Treat Asylum Cases Differently.")

Currently, there is tension between African American and immigrants of African descent. Immigrants do not wish to assimilate because they do not want to be disadvantaged as African Americans are. African Americans are concerned that privileged immigrants stifle their opportunity to take advantage of affirmative action programs. At Harvard, the intent of the affirmative action program was to bring disadvantaged people of African descent to Harvard. The people taking advantage of the program are very privileged people of African descent (wealthy families, many of them immigrants or children of immigrants). The criticism of that is the assumption that everyone who is black is actually from an oppressed background.

Andy Young, in the Introduction to *The Closing Door* admitted that Affirmative Action was always a cop out. The people who pushed for it knew that it would only benefit the most privileged African Americans, but they were worried about being repressed / silenced.

Many people argue that the large wave of immigration of the early 20th century is lauded as a success is because it was followed by a long-enough period of limited entry that the immigrant population had time to be absorbed into the general population. Favorable policies during that wave of immigration were specifically exclusionary along racial lines.

It is now too late to reverse the effects of widespread non-European, non-white immigration because there is a large enough population here already that they must be absorbed. The associated issues are here to stay.