

CITIZEN PARTICIPATION AND THE MINORITY VIEWPOINT

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If I may, I would like to amend the topic given me so that instead of the minority point of view I will discuss the nonwhite group point of view. We might get into a semantic question as to what constitutes a minority. What we are really talking about are people who are not white.

I could just as well suggest that the topic be "a view from the back of the bus." That is not difficult for you to understand. The fact of the matter is that there is a very close relation in this country between race and transportation. If some of the planners in the past had taken into account this historic perspective, then, I suggest, much of the urban crisis could have been avoided. When you talk about nonwhites, you are talking about hyphenated citizens who are in most instances not even recognized as viable entities in the community. So when we suggest that they should participate in a democracy, in which on various occasions they have been legislated out of citizenship roles, we are really coming around full circle.

The reason, in some years past, that nonwhites had to ride in the back of the bus was that this was the most objectionable place to ride. On a train, the most objectionable place to ride was toward the front, and so nonwhites rode there. In some communities, a number of years ago, a black person could not purchase a new automobile; he had to buy a used car. To suggest that these people now be allowed to assist in the planning of a total community is not an easy thing for some people to understand. To many, there is still a question of why they should be asked at all.

The question of transportation is one of mobility. Mobility in nonwhite life is being able to survive by using whatever has been assigned to you. Perhaps the most graphic example of that relates to housing. Nonwhites still as of this minute cannot move freely in the housing market. Furniture, clothing, automobiles, and trips abroad can be easily obtained, but a house in any location is still obtained with difficulty if at all.

The housing that nonwhites occupy serves as a means of still identifying race with transportation. The tendency has been to build certain roadways through what is referred to as the poor or nonwhite districts. The advantages are that the people would not protest too much because they had no political clout and the land is inexpensive. Those districts have, therefore, become favored locations for highways, federal buildings, hospital expansions, and so on.

You take away a certain number of housing units on the theory that you are going to improve transportation by new capital facilities or that you are going to replace a blighted area in an urban renewal program. But the question is, Where are the people to go? In many cases when the relocation procedures were not so closely followed as they are now, a governmental agency would suggest to the federal government that it had an ample inventory of clean, decent, safe, and sanitary homes to relocate these people in when, in fact, that would be a lie.

The people forced to move would move to the next area vacated by whites, and that became the next slum because, in every urban renewal project that I know of, the number of units that were rebuilt on the land where the people were forced to move from was less than the units there in the beginning, and the units were too high-priced for the people to afford. So the planning process as it pertains to citizen participation in urban renewal and transportation is only of late giving any sort of recognition at all to the fact that perhaps planners have created more ill than good in the sense of compounding social problems.

The basic reason that I got involved in the consulting business was because of the failure of the city of Cleveland in the early 50s to involve people in the planning process. Cleveland was one of the first cities to have a major urban renewal program and is perhaps the only city that had all of its funds cut off by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development because it did such a miserable job in executing that program.

But those at city hall were playing a trick not only on the nonwhites but also on everybody else as well from the standpoint of citizen participation, which was required under the program in urban renewal. What would happen is that a letter would be sent to various organizations suggesting the intent and the benefits of a program and asking the organization to endorse it. If the organization sent an endorsement, it would be used as evidence to the federal government of citizen participation. Many of us challenged this and spoke in opposition to the kind of demolition programs that were planned for certain areas in the city. We pointed out that the law requiring the formation of at least 2 committees was not being followed and that there had been no certification that there was enough housing available for the nonwhites they were forcing to relocate. In response, they used figures of anticipated new housing starts that were exaggerated way out of proportion. If they thought a house might be available, they would suggest that it would accommodate 3 families.

The end result is that the political decision was made for the benefit of private developers. The result of this strictly monetary operation was the creation of the Cleveland slum that is called the Hough area and that many people hear of during the 60s because of the street demonstrations (I do not use the word riot). Many people were forced into Hough because it was the next community in terms of low-cost housing and availability to nonwhites.

Who can adequately represent nonwhites? Can the existing process be used politically by nonwhites as it is used by whites to stop—let me emphasize—to stop certain transportation programs that were designed for them instead of with them?

I suggest that, were planners to view nonwhites not as objects of suspicion but as human beings who have the same desires as everybody else, this would not be a complicated problem. But we do not do that to a large extent because we do not want to get too close to the masses. If we can find a good reverend with a sizable church, we use him to talk through the pulpit to the population in that area. If we can find a councilman who has perpetuated his office by seeing that certain people get on welfare rolls and in certain housing units, we might ask him to deal with all those people. Or perhaps we can work through a black newspaper editor or a nonwhite editor in the community who needs advertising from a major firm.

We will deal with the citizens themselves only if we have to. Many white planners have never had the experience of talking with nonwhite people on an equal level. They may talk with somebody who takes care of the house or the yard, who drives the car, or who serves at the club but not with somebody who is an equal as a citizen. I suggest that the white planner who has this hang-up has complicated the urban problem more than the nonwhite resident who has been moved involuntarily from one place to another without the chance to adequately help himself through the citizen participation process.

Very few legislators I have ever worked with—and I have worked with quite a few across this country—have ever adopted the point of view of disadvantaged people in their consideration of legislation. Those who have done so only to the extent required to get reelected. The advantaged and the people with vested interests who have lobbyists get the ear of the legislators. The people who have a stake in what the laws are see that those legislators are taken care of in any number of ways in return for favorable votes on those laws that increase or do not interfere with profits.

Because the nonwhite citizens have not been able to express themselves in the present governmental procedures in a manner they find comfortable, they have developed the idea of controlling their turf. If they cannot get the governmental process to work for them or to work fast enough, then they will now control the schools in their area and the police departments and the fire departments and everything else; the rest of you just stay out! It is self-defeating, of course, but what else is available other than to burn the neighborhoods down because one cannot get bus transportation to town?

So we see a frustrated nonwhite community that has been left leaderless to a large extent by assassinations and by people who have grown tired of the struggle or who perhaps have attained a measure of economic sufficiency so that they can go home at night instead of going to meetings. The lack of leadership at the national level reverberates down to the state and local level, where the void is filled by people who will assert themselves as leaders. The only way they know how to get attention is by doing something that some in the community will probably not like but that the newspapers will cover. In the area of transportation, nonwhites will control their areas. If a highway or a transit system is built through those areas, then that means 40 percent of the jobs will go to nonwhites. If a shopping center is built in those areas, then that means putting citizens on the boards of directors so that they have a voice in the control and in the sharing of the profits of those enterprises.

Whether that is good or bad depends on the total plan. Who is the plan supposed to serve: the people in the suburban area who get the first attention or the people in the inner city? If you talk to the people in Washington, D.C., they probably will suggest to you that Metro is designed for the suburbanites. If you talk to people in San Francisco, they will say that BART was designed for the suburbanites. Whether that is true will be observed in the months ahead as those systems are completed and we see how many stops are in the inner city and how many people actually benefit.

There is another aspect of transportation that has a very relevant and very receptive history with regard to nonwhites. It happened in Alabama when Rosa Parks decided she was tired, wanted to sit down, and would not get up and give her seat to a white person. This led to a bus boycott that gave rise to one of this country's most gifted leaders, Martin Luther King, Jr. Here again, it was an incident on a bus, a transport facility, that traditionally has symbolized the degree of racism to nonwhites in this country. From that one boycott, we had the 1964 civil rights laws, public accommodation laws, voting rights law, and, even more important than the laws themselves, the whole question of enforcement of those laws. The federal government started enforcing those laws to ensure a measure of citizenship to those people who had not been able to vote before. So in a sort of a strange way, this whole question of transportation gave rise to perhaps the greatest social legislation in any one 10-year period this country had ever seen.

There is still abuse, however. Some of us equate transportation facilities with certain jobs. For example, if you happen to work for a bus company—whether inner city, Greyhound, or Trailways— and are a nonwhite, you will probably wash the bus, but you will not work on the engine. If you work for a railroad company, you work either in the dining car or as a porter, but you are never a conductor or engineer; those are white jobs.

In 1973, the prospect of a highway coming through the city raises all sorts of notions in the minds of nonwhites and the poor based on past experiences of what highways and the transportation planning officials do that adversely affect them as citizens. I suggest that the same procedures that are used in encouraging white people to take part in the decision-making process be used in encouraging nonwhites to share in the decision-making process. But let me suggest further that there may be many gripe sessions

involved and there may be a lot of wind blown that is not really catching any sails. But you have to remember there are very few public forums where people who have been intentionally cut out of the system can have a chance to vent their emotions and to get off their chest things that they had on their chest for 10 or 15 years. Although we may not have psychiatric training, I think we ought to fully understand the social consequences of our physical planning before we inaugurate the plan.

There was a highway planned for Cleveland not long ago that would have displaced some 1,400 black families. Not one official in the entire city suggested where they would be relocated even though existing law requires that there must be existing housing to move people into. So the planner with his yardstick and T-square, with his budget and timetable takes no account of the social elements and consequences of his planning, particularly as they apply to that part of the community that has intentionally been cut out of the decision-making process.

I hope that more conferences of this type will be conducted for planners so that there will be a total awareness of what happens in nonwhite neighborhoods when any kind of capital improvement program is implemented. I would suggest further that the planning process, which traditionally has routed highways through the so-called least expensive areas, might now attempt to determine where the facilities are actually needed as opposed to where land can be obtained for the least price. What must be included in that process is that (a) out of respect, if nothing else, the people must be consulted, for the people are currently aware that planners have to talk to them or else they will not get their program through; (b) if any relocation is required, planners must take into account the special problems so that the people are not simply pushed into the slum next to their community; and (c) capital grant projects should become new avenues of employment for nonwhite people.

The nonwhite unemployment runs 3 or 4 times that of white unemployment. Jobs must be made available for nonwhites on capital projects is what I am saying. When you tell me about the jetport that will generate \$70 million more to the community, my question is, How does that affect this part of the community that was never included in the economy that you already have? If a new transit system is to be built that will take 10 years to complete, who will get the jobs? Where are the opportunities for employment so that a project can serve more than one purpose?

In my judgment, most of the problems that have occurred in the past with regard to white and nonwhite relations have been caused by the roles whites have assigned to nonwhites. For example, the blacks were brought to this country to work in the fields in the South. The Chinese came over primarily during the post-Civil War period to lay railroads to the West Coast, and that is where they are today. The Indian would not be put in slavery, so he was put on a reservation, and that is where he is today. We need not continue to perpetuate those roles today. As planners, we must realize that all want some control over their lives and that all need jobs—nonwhite as well as white. If we then look at the potential growth of this country in terms of not having limitations, then I suggest planning in nonwhite communities not only would be beneficial but also would result in the total community progress that has eluded us for so many years.