



67<sup>th</sup> annual Human Services Institute: March 13, 2009

Excerpts from the Eugene H. Freedheim Lecture

Robert D. Bullard, Ware Distinguished Professor of Sociology and Director of the Environmental Justice Resource Center at Clark Atlanta University

*Growing Smarter: Achieving Livable Communities and Environmental Justice*

The point I make in all of my books...is to connect the dots. Housing is connected to health, to access, to opportunity, to transportation, to quality of life...I use the World Health Organization's definition of health: "Health is more than the absence of disease or infirmity." You can't have a healthy community if you have unemployment, poverty, and health disparities—if you have a community that is being dumped on by all kinds of environmental stressors. You can't have a healthy community if the community has to go long distances just to get something as basic as food...

I have a very simplistic definition of environment: "***The environment is everything...where we live, work, play, go to school, worship, as well as the physical and natural world.***" So that doesn't leave a whole lot out. On the first day of class, I ask my students, "How many of you are environmentalists?" One or two raise their hands. So I reframe and ask "How many of you breathe?" and just about everybody raises their hand. How many of you drink water? How many are considered about what's in the water? How many of you eat food? How many are considered about what's in the food? If you answer two out of three, you're an environmentalist and just don't know it...

It's not just about bird watching and whale watching. Those things are very important... But we also want to talk about the endangered species in our urban core—neighborhoods in our urban core, those children who are poisoned by lead and that don't have safe places to play outside on playgrounds...

Every community has the right to equal protection of our environmental laws, housing laws, health laws, transportation laws, and so on. These are basic human rights. And so when we're dealing with these issues and this idea of smart growth and growing smarter and growing greener, we can do all those things but...we will not succeed unless we grow fairer. We have to do it all with the idea of eliminating disparities and addressing legacy issues of inequality....

We want Cleveland, Atlanta, and Chicago to rise to the top of "best places"... We've got dozens of magazines that rank cities on dozens of issues—the "safest place"—and you've always got an opposite—the healthiest place, the fittest place, the greenest, the most sustainable, and so on. We want to make sure we do everything we can across the board in a very interdisciplinary way to achieve the best place for our community and for our city. We want to have the most walkable communities, where our kids can walk, can ride their bikes, and can do those things that we know kids do outside as opposed to sitting inside exercising their thumbs on Gameboys...

If you talk about what makes a region sustainable, you're talking about air quality, water quality, jobs, housing—the physical, natural, and social environments...

[Cities were ranked] in terms of sustainability in 50 cities on 16 different items ...Cleveland is ranked 16 out of 50 cities ...it's not number 49, and it's not number one...we have to deal with reality...talk about fitness, talk about what makes a region healthy when it comes to nutrition and type of food that's available...whether or not people have access to physical activity. So when we talk about going green, it's more than just slogans...

When we look at amount of acreage in terms of parks in terms of thousands of persons ...Cleveland has 3,127 total park acres, which comes out to about seven acres per 1,000 persons...Having green space is good---it's not rocket science—even in the ghetto. There's nothing written that says poor people don't have the right to jog, walk, and ride their bikes...We know all parks are not created equal. There are some parks we don't want our kids to have to play in...[references to specific parks across the street from refineries in Louisiana, Texas, New Jersey, New York City]...

You go to any city and you'll find a walkable community...and you'll find what has happened in terms of how those communities got to become walkable: investments, specific planning to become walkable—they just don't happen by happenstance...

You are what you eat...and having good nutritious food in the morning and at lunch and in the evening makes a difference...But many of our neighborhoods are deserts where there are no restaurants or good healthy food markets and farmers markets and grocery stores and supermarkets, and so people have to cross deserts...Supermarket redlining is real...It's where supermarkets decide they're leaving and people are left with no basic food service ...you get your food out of a convenient store or a gas station...We'd all like to have a whole food store in our neighborhood, but it costs money to eat healthy. Some people say "That's not whole food; that's whole paycheck!"...

Why is that we have to have so many liquor stores in our neighborhoods—and even ones you can drive through, get your liquor, and keep rolling? You can even buy shotguns and liquor at the same store...

It's easier to get to unhealthy food than it is to get to healthy apples, and we want our children to eat healthy and get to healthy fruits and vegetables as opposed to getting to a greasy hamburger. We want variety, but we don't want variety between eating a pizza, a hot dog, and a hamburger. How about some healthy food? What we end up having in many of our neighborhoods is diesel-fried chicken, and so what we end up having is childhood obesity, which is an epidemic which is environmental-related ...all these things are interrelated. The built environment is related to our health...

All communities are not created equal. Some are more equal than others. If a community happens to be low-income, working class, or community of color, or physically located on the wrong side of the tracks, it receives less than its fair share of the good things...libraries, good schools, basic necessities that some communities call amenities that are taken for granted...a grocery store, a park, a full service bank—not check cashing, not payday loans...

Even children are not safe from the problems that we're talking about. The most vulnerable population in our society is not safe. Even our schools are not safe from pollution ... Bad air kills. Bad air sends people to the hospital. We need to green the zones where the kids are, and the way you green them is to get rid of the pollution...Cleveland has 275 schools that are in the worst polluted school areas ...dirty industries, polluted air creating problems.

In the last three weeks, I've met with the new EPA administrator five times. The new EPA administrator is an African America woman from New Orleans who grew up in the lower ninth ward and had to evacuate her mother from Katrina. She knows what it means when the government does not respond. She said schools and air problems are priorities. A nation is judged by the way it treats its children. Having lead smelters, refineries,

kilns, power plants located across from schools...the pollution is going into the classroom of elementary schools. So how do we address this whole idea of protecting the most vulnerable? If we protect the most vulnerable population and make the regulations stringent so that they do protect the most vulnerable, we are protected—adults are protected. The EPA for the last eight years has failed to protect children...there are a lot of toxic products out there impacting children...We know what lead does...we're getting improvements...we know where Cleveland stands today, improving in terms of childhood lead poisoning...numbers are going down, but having *even one child lead poisoned is too many*...

There has to be a climate justice movement because the people who are hit first, hit worst, hit hardest, and hit longest are the people who have little resources...We all know that people with money have a cushion during economic disasters as well as natural disasters. If you don't have a savings account or something as basic as a car, you can't escape a disaster. If something hits and you have to rely on a bus and the buses are flooded, where are you? Up the creek. So we have to address equity. We have to address fairness...

Because we have such miserable transportation planning, we're wasting a lot of money. We waste \$78 billion because we're stuck in traffic. That's a lot of money. Think of what we could do with \$78 billion wasted in energy and fuel from sitting in traffic. Other than housing, transportation is the second biggest ticket item...

The right to breathe clean air is a basic right. The right to pollute is not a right. Smog kills. Ground level ozone is a killer. And the fact is that, even when we have rules and the science, our government does not do enough to protect the most vulnerable. We know where hot spots are—that's where levels of ground ozone are dangerous and are part of what we call non-attainment where the community has not met the EPA standard. Thousands of people are being sent to the hospital and dying because of ground level ozone. We can expect to see more bad air days and more cities in non-attainment and more heat waves and red alerts. And that means we can expect to see more asthma and more kids being sent to the hospital...*Air pollution kills over 70,000 people a year*—that's more people than die in car accidents...

We have to prevent these health disparities and eliminate those disparities and at the same time we have to address the fact that many of our health systems have lots of holes. The public health safety net is falling apart ...Charity hospitals, public hospitals that generally serve poor people and the uninsured, have problems And so, if people don't have health insurance and they can't get to the doctor, what are they supposed to do? Well, die. We say *that's unacceptable*. We know that cleaning up the air is more than aesthetics ...cleaning up the air can actually extend your lifespan ...

**If we are go grow smarter, healthier, and more sustainable, we have to address legacy issues of social justice and equity. It's all about health. Planners should plan communities and developers should develop communities as if their grandmothers live next door.**