



2018 COLLEGE OF FELLOWS

Induction Ceremony

Sunday, April 22, 2018 | New Orleans

Transcript of Class of 2018 Speech by Maxine Griffith, FAICP

Good Afternoon –

It's been said that there is no greater honor than to be recognized by one's peers. I believe that my fellow inductees would join me in thanking the College of Fellows for allowing us to join their ranks.

Although being able to stand on this podium represents a particular honor for me, I also realize that my remarks cannot truly represent the sentiments of each one of the talented and very good-looking planners being honored today. I can only speak for myself - in what I've been told should be brief remarks - so I will focus on 2 issues that have been on my mind and I hope that they will resonate. The topics are power and diversity.

I think that for many of us the simple act of collecting the documents necessary to apply to be a fellow was a revelation. Folks who normally work hard to make a mayor, client, or a city manager look good for once had to face the fact that they, too, deserved praise--that they had done work to be proud of, work that was critical to the health of their cities, counties, towns, villages – to our country.

So, I posit that as planners we should better recognize our own potential– and not be needlessly humble. Especially in these times of strife and division with difficult, seemingly insoluble problems before us, and where we don't seem to be able to talk to each other - it may be time for planners to get in the front of the line.

After all, we have the skill-set. We provide a comprehensive and integrated approach to problem solving, an approach that yields solutions. We're expert at generating consensus, we are collaborative and we understand the "Interrelatedness of choices and the long range consequences of our actions." We are responsive and responsible ... and we have the data!

So I've been thinking that planners need to take a more robust role in American society. Of course, that means being fully engaged in the leadership of planning agencies and consulting firms, the traditional vehicles of our professional life. Others are involved in church, temple, mosque or the PTA. But I ask if some of us should be doing a bit more.

Have you thought about running for Mayor, City Council, or for School Board? What about the State House? Of course there are already some members of the profession that have held these roles. For instance, my friend Maurice Cox, now the highly successful Planning Director of Detroit, Michigan, once served as Mayor of Charlottesville. But then there are the rest of us.

The AICP Code of Ethics states that: "Our primary obligation is to serve the public interest and we, therefore, owe our allegiance to a conscientiously attained concept of the public interest that is formulated through continuous and open debate. We shall achieve high standards of professional integrity, proficiency, and knowledge"

I hoped to be a bit provocative – but I am simply asking that we consider the proposition that as planners we lean in to power.

OK - now for diversity.

Several years ago I was asked to speak on a national conference panel. There were 3 of us on this panel and we were each asked to bring one slide that represented our greatest current planning challenge. I may have brought a slide that represented our lack of affordable housing or something like that; frankly I don't quite remember, but I do remember that after I spoke, Joanne Garnett FAICP, a great planner from [Wyoming], flashed a slide of a wolf. She went on to speak about traditional [Wyoming] values and views regarding land use. She talked about fences and about building consensus. I was fascinated and realized that never in a million years would I have put wolves and planning together in my mind.

Because as planners we shape the environment in which people lead their lives and because there are lots of kinds of people in our country, we need the profession to reflect the richness and variety that is America. Everyone has to be at the leadership table: Native American, gay, lesbian and transgender -- rich, poor – Asian, Black, White and Latino - folks who grew up in trailers – and those who came of age in public housing.

Because even with the best of intentions and the deepest empathy, we can't live someone else's life or see through their eyes. Even now, I just don't think much about wolves. Additionally, and perhaps more importantly, today's challenges require everybody's talents, actively engaged – thinking out of the box, side by side, bringing their unique vision to problem solving.

Now I know that for the most part, I'm preaching to the converted - APA and AICP have launched diversity initiatives, undertaken research and promoted programs in support of diversity in the profession. As a past member of the APA board and a participant in a myriad of committees, I was part of those efforts and I know that there is serious commitment to these principles. But still, according to the last U.S. Census where 12.3% of the U.S.

population is Black, and 12.5% is Hispanic, only 3% of our profession identifies as Black or African-American and only 4% Hispanic. I know that the percentage in APA may be a bit higher, but I am asking that we – as an organization - take on the task, not just of settling for a greater proportion of a small number– but to make that 3 and 4% number bigger.

Now, I am not an expert in this field. If you want to talk campus planning, waterfront development or mixed-use districts, sign me up. But after having been given an opportunity to view the Association's latest and, I think, very good, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy paper, I do have a couple of thoughts. The broad statements in the paper are great – but as they say, "God is in the details." I am sure that for each one of the statements there will be a detailed action plan, and that plan will be key. For instance, if you plan to reach out to Historically Black Colleges – one would want to know how many HBCU's will be engaged; what's the communication strategy; how many staffers are working on the issue; has one researched best practices in other professions; how will success be judged and what funds are being allocated to support the effort. A friend and mentor once told me, if you want to know a Mayor's priorities – don't listen to the speeches, look at the budget. I also wonder if it wouldn't be helpful to have more diversity amongst APA staff, especially in senior positions.

This important work can't just be left to staff-- organization leadership has a role. Divisions and Chapters have a role. Each one of us who believes that these are worthy goals has to step up to the plate and pledge to do something, perhaps one small thing, to reach these objectives.

I return to the AICP Code of Ethics, which states -
"We shall seek social justice by working to expand choice and opportunity for all persons, recognizing a special responsibility to plan for the needs of the disadvantaged and to promote racial and economic integration."

Our organizations have a long, complex history with some bumps in the road – but we know from experience that we are better together and making positive change is what planners do.

In conclusion, I want to extend personal thanks to the members of this essential profession; to my mentors, teachers and friends -- to those of you who returned my emails when I was desperate for an answer just before I walked into a Commission meeting; to those of you who heard me out when I needed to vent about my boss, who just didn't get it. To those who I only see once a year at these conferences, and those who I see every day. Planners are kind, open-minded, collegial, thoughtful and wise.

I am proud to be a planner and I am proud to now be a member of the AICP College of Fellows.

Thank you.