

KINGSTON'S FUTURE

The Eleventh Annual Bustamante Lecture - 1996.

(This lecture was presented at the Jamaica Conference Center on March 4. 1996)

- PREAMBLE

I would like to leave you with the following ideas:

- You don't build a city - it develops
- It develops "naturally" in that it is restricted by structure and *responsive* to stimuli.
- It is *always* a reflection of our character.
- The Institutions which manage it are the link between its physical structure and its times
- Lastly and not as unrelated as you might think - Personal responsibility is *never* transferable.)

I am going to start by talking about *us* a little. About how we perceive our problems.

I am then going to talk a little about cities and human development in general. Because we need to remember that after the spiritual, the fact that we are part of human culture is the context for our lives.

Finally, I am going to dream a little - because that's my nature and my role and we need to allow ourselves to dream.

- INTRODUCTION

Cities are reflections of cultures.

Kingston as our City, is our own reflection.

Each of us lives a different life and for each of us there is a different city. We take this for granted and are reminded of it only when we end up on a new street or in a new neighborhood or most dramatically when we find ourselves on a street that is a forgotten habit of another time in our life.

Our different cities are of different sizes and of different qualities. For those of us who drive cars, Kingston is small and limited in events, a simple city in comparison to that of the pedestrian. Imagine how much more you would see if you walked. Imagine walking in Downtown Kingston. Imagine how much more knowledge the walkers have.

We should worry at the ability of the drivers of our society to pronounce on Jamaican matters with such certainty. After all, for many of them, their only experience of the place is via peripheral viewing of the same repetitive routes.

Last year I was disturbed by an architectural historian's reference to Jamaica as a "tragic" country. He was referring to our betrayal of ourselves in allowing the worst side of us to dominate our development. He recognized that we are small enough to have conquered the handicaps that dominate more unwieldy societies but have so far let the opportunity pass us by.

Jamaica's tragedy is Kingston's. We have allowed an essentially beautiful little city to develop into a squalid, violent horror. Kingston is our reflection and it is sick - Are we really going to watch ourselves die in the mirror?

- THE ILLNESS AS WE PERCEIVE IT

It is hard to know yourself from the inside looking out. You can see your extremities but not your heart nor your overall structure. You make assumptions that you are similar to those around you. Even looking in a mirror can be misleading. Thru their questions, here is how our ruling class see the problem of Kingston.

We break down the big question about what to do about Downtown into a number of smaller questions that hint at a sense of loss of something important to us and betray our predisposition to practicality. Here are the most common questions:

Do you think Downtown will ever come back?
How do we get people downtown again?
How can we get back some of the good old traditions of Jamaican life?
How can we improve infrastructure and amenities?
How can we renew "derelict and abandoned" neighborhoods?

I wont:

- Tell you where we should improve infrastructure and amenities.
Most of the most desirable of such improvements are not only known but have their planning work complete and in some cases are partly complete. I will get back to these.
- Tell you what "derelict and abandoned" neighborhoods we should renew - for there are no derelict or abandoned neighborhoods Downtown and for any of our many leaders to even momentarily think so is cause for concern. It demonstrates their ability to makes thousands of people invisible.
- Tell you how to make Downtown "come back". (For most of Jamaica, It never

left.)

- Tell you how to get us to use Downtown again for; It is used till it is threadbare.
- Tell you how to revive the lost traditions of the good old life. They are really still here and alive. People downtown still go to "Town" to shop, eat an imperative Sunday Dinner, greet you with hundreds of good mornings and good nights, beat drums, sing and drink rum for their dead, and maintain the most Jamaican of all traditions in their aspiration for the upward mobility for their children.

If none of these questions require answers, then what is the Problem? Lets try to understand it by getting outside of ourselves for a little and by looking back at our origins.

● THE STRUCTURE OF CITIES

You don't build a city - *it* develops

It develops "naturally" in that it is restricted by structure and *responsive* to stimuli.

If we cant actually build it, we can control it and we do this by nurturing the structures which nurture its development.

There are two types of structure which support a city - Physical structure and Institutional structure. The former sets the pattern, the latter guides development and bridges the gap between artifact and life. Lets examine them separately:

- Roads

First, lets look at our Physical Structure. The most obvious and durable part of the city is its circulation layout - its roads and footpaths. There are two basic types of road layout namely - one which is pre-determined by a "Plan" and the other which is the entrenchment of existing foot paths. Downtown Kingston's is of the first type while the rest of Kingston seems to be basically of the second type.

The origin of the new city called Kingston was the problem caused by the destruction of Port Royal in 1692. The origin of its *plan* is intellectual and idealistic. It is a classic "Grid Iron" Plan and its pedigree is ancient. The so called "Grid-Iron" plan is ascribed to one, Hippodamus, a Greek of the times of Aristotle (Say the mid four hundreds B.C.) (The term Grid-Iron sounds modern to me and seems to be a reference to the squared pattern of the type of griddle on which we cook waffles. In other words, the plan of Kingston is like a waffle iron in that it is a pattern of similar rectangles) Hippodamus's notoriety is instructive as to human nature for in the face of the certainty that it is not true, he is credited with the "invention" of the Grid Iron Plan. This is an intellectual convenience which I will also take advantage of. It allows me to talk about his ideals. For above all else, he

was an idealist.

Hippodamus was a Pythagorean (As in Pythagoras as in the Pythagorean Theorem as in the square of the Hypotenuse of a triangle is equal to the sum of the squares of its sides. (The term pythagorean theorem seems to be another intellectual convenience for it is said that the Babylonians knew of this relationship 1,000 years before Pythagoras) Anyway, his plan for Miletus of 470 B.C. is a physical demonstration of Pythagorean proportions and numerology. We see a simple division of land into a rectangular grid where Pythagoreans saw "male" and "female" numerological constellations and gnomon numbers. (I don't know what those things are either, but it's not important for our purposes. What is important is that he was not motivated by practicality)

The next part is at least recognizable. It is suggested that "His true innovation consisted in realizing that the form of the city was the form of its social order, and that to remodel one it is necessary to introduce appropriate changes in the other. He seems too to have realized that town planning should have not merely an immediate practical aim, but an ideal goal of larger dimensions; and he thought of his art as a means of formally embodying and clarifying a more *rational* social order." (Note the word "rational" as opposed to the word "just". Jamaicans would certainly be more at home with rationality than with justice. Justice is, unfortunately for us, the word usually associated with social order today.)

Aristotle, of all people, tells us that Hippodamus's ideal social order was "composed of 10,000 citizens divided into three parts - one of artisans, one of husbandmen, and a third of armed defenders of the state. He also divided the land into three parts, one sacred, one public and the third private: The first was set apart to maintain the customary worship of the gods, the second was to support the warriors, the third was the property of the husbandmen."

How's that for an origin for the form of our little city? It goes on -

The next step in our pedigree is the Roman standardized town. This was a simple grid-iron plan that the Romans used to build in new places that they conquered. The city was oriented to harmonize with cosmic order. Its two principal streets the *cardo* and *decumannus* ran north-south and east-west respectively. These are our King and Queen streets.

Other descendants of the Roman and Greek town in Kingston are the military parade ground "Parade" and our arcaded streets. Here is a lovely description by one - Libanius in 360 A.D. about Antioch's sixteen miles of colonnaded streets:

"... it seems to me that the pleasantest, yes, and most profitable side of city

life is society and human intercourse... (*Antioch*)... by Zeus, is truly a city where these are most found. It is good to talk and better to listen, and best of all to give advice, to sympathize with ones friends' experiences, sharing their joys and sorrows and getting like sympathy from them - these and countless other blessings come of man's meeting his fellows. People in other cities who have no colonnades before their houses are kept apart by bad weather; nominally, they live in the same town, but in fact they are as remote from each other as if they lived in different towns. ... the habit of friendship is matured by constant intercourse..."

These are our origins and although it may seem unlikely that our city could really be fashioned after things of such a distant time (like a concern for the habit of friendship in a society, it is probable that the connection is not accidental.

References to classical models is a recurring phenomenon of art. Yes planning a town is an art. Imagine, this town with all its problems is not only in harmony with the cosmos, but was intended to be.

- Subdivision

If roads are interesting, then what about people? The cities major gesture toward individual human beings is the subdivision of land. The individual lot of land is the element that links directly to the individual and thru him to his past and future family and to the immediate and larger community. Lets look at Kingston a little and see if we cant begin to understand some of our problem from the nature of its subdivision.

Even though, the original layout of the city provided for a basic lot size of 50'x150'. That arrangement seems to have gotten readjusted and today, the typical basic lot of land is about 25'x75' in the residential areas. this is fine for a single residence or traditional small business. As the scale of commerce has changed and commerce has supplanted residence, lots have been grouped together. This is natural and a problem is created only by the mega-assembly of lands as practiced by large institutions such as governments. When the individual land size is out of proportion to the scale of *creative* institutions the land becomes static and loses social meaning. It becomes a mere paper asset to institutions.

This is a little confusing, but take a little time with it. It is something you see all the time. It is the reason for the vacant land of the Kingston and Montego Bay waterfronts and the reason why New Kingston has grown so steadily. It is simple; If you have small lots, the small person can become a developer, and the larger person can be a large developer by assembling land. **Large single pieces of land are too large for anyone but the largest of institutions and so their options for development are limited.** Personal development of land either for homes or businesses is part of the process of developing commerce in a society. If you don't

have an appropriate scale to your land, it will become stagnant. Thus the stagnation of our two major waterfronts which would be as vital as New Kingston if they had been subdivided.

The issue is not only the size of lots but is the supply and subsequent availability of them. As I have said, ownership of land is one of the links between the individual and the community. When people own their own land, they begin to build a personal power base for their own little economy. All Jamaicans know this. They know it because there has always been a problem with the supply of small lots in Jamaica. The large holdings get subdivided too slowly for population growth. Thus people settle where they can get away with it. *They become lawless squatters.* As a community grows, its population must be accommodated. In 1692, the Jamaica Assembly knew this and provided lots in the form of a base for the city of Kingston. They provided individual lots *before* they told the population to "go out and buy your own."

In addition to size and supply there is a problem of availability. (Yes, there is a difference between supply and availability.) The point is that land is not always a lifeless thing. In a city through individual ownership it becomes a part of the living organism which is our society. Our downtown used to be lived in by its owners. Merchants lived above shops, and families lived in their own homes. Gradually, for one reason or another, these people have moved outward to other residential areas. This is common all over the world. In our case, as time has passed, the original owners have not just been absent from downtown, they have disappeared. Many have died without passing the land on clearly. Others have emigrated. Others are around but hold the land only for its "book" value. It has no functioning value either within their personal lives or their businesses or within our society.

This is a kind of abandonment which causes stagnation. The city goes into a kind of limbo. In our case, although people take up a kind of legal residence on these lands (they pay rent to someone), they either don't have the power to purchase or most often can't find the owners. In this way we end up with communities in which the residents have no stake.

These are the reasons why two of the genuinely constructive things taking place in our society are the Land Titling Program and Operation Pride. They are both based on an understanding that you can only build large structures such as society from the bottom up. We should try supplementing them with an institution to facilitate the revitalization of dormant property by sale to owner occupiers. In other words, let's help the people that live downtown to own downtown so that they will have a stake in the place.

- Institutions

That is all about the basic Physical Structure. But, cities are not static structures - You may make plans but - *you don't build a city - it develops*. It develops thru the accumulated acts of its many individuals. The study of the development of cities is the study of the development of human institutions. It is when we are packed together that we develop structures to protect ourselves from our own selfishness. These institutions are the other side of the structure of the city. Even though they are more perishable than the physical parts of which I have spoken, they are an equally important foundation. Unfortunately we have allowed these parts of the structure to deteriorate and are paying the price. This is the nature of our failure as citizens (It is not a coincidence that the word citizen sounds like the word city.)

A part of the problem seems to be the scale of our institutions and in particular the confusion of Local with National government. I think this is understandable on a small island such as ours. In larger societies a community the size of Kingston would have discreet institutions which would not be confused with the national or even regional bodies. We talk about this as an abstraction, but the essence of local government is the idea of community and when people refer to community development, they mean empowering residents to become communities because they understand that things run better when people have a direct stake.

This is part of our city's structural problem, for with the best road layout in the world, if the planners, garbage collectors, the developers of parks and playgrounds, the fire department, the police department, maintainers of roads and drains and the providers of water, are not a part of the community, they have no direct stake and can sidestep accountability.

In consistently inventing devices to sidestep our institutions and in under supporting them, we have managed to make them ineffective. This has been done to allow for opportunism. Society purposefully puts such institutions in the way of individual selfishness so why do we remove them? Our excuse is expediency and there lies the heart of the problem. You see, *we lack imagination*. We never developed the ability to believe in the future.

- LET'S SHARE SOME VISIONS OF THE FUTURE AND DARE TO DREAM!

Jamaica hasn't begun to have to deal with urban problems, for the problems of our lopsided society are much simpler than those which we will have to face if we were to dare to attempt to build a Rational or a Just society. I don't know how we will manage with this future possibility for we are doing badly with our current level of problems. Lets look at the backlog of work before we contemplate the future.

Some are works to be done to solve old problems and some begin to pave the way for the future. I made reference earlier to solutions which were known or in progress and for

those of you who don't know, here are some of them. Most have been talked about for years. Some are begun but are unforgivably stalled, Some have been perverted out of recognition. There is no order of importance.

- Complete the West Kingston Market Program so that 12,000 plus Jamaicans can try to make a living in an environment worthy of their own decency. These people feed and cloth a large part of our society. Most of the food for all of Jamaica is handled by them.
- Complete the Coast road thru to Rockfort. (There is a harbour-front road that most people don't even know is partially built between Raetown and Rockfort. It will provide a new entrance to the city and open up more of the waterfront for our appreciation and development. It is along this strip that the urban center should develop.)
- Complete the dualization of South Camp Road to improve the access to downtown in the future.
- Complete Ocean Boulevard to Breezy Castle to relieve future pressure on Port Royal and Harbour Streets.
- Develop Port Royal as an enrichment of our lives and an enjoyment of our history and invite tourists to come help us enjoy and pay for it.
- Build an adequate sewage treatment facility so that we can clean Kingston Harbour.
(Do all of you remember back in the 70's when we dug up Constant Spring Road and other places and stopped development in many areas of the city in order to build the mains for a sewage collection system. We did this to eliminate pits which pollute the underground water. Well, most of what we collect in those mains is piped through the present treatment plant into the harbour or in some cases diverted to the harbour before it reaches the Plant.)
- Complete the Harbour street sewer trunk so that the collector systems above Harbour Street can be renewed and a system can be provided for Raetown. The children of Southside and TelAviv live in rivers of raw sewage. The people of Raetown have to cross a section of the harbour front road mentioned above to empty their chimies into the harbour every morning. That is within a half mile of this lovely state of the art room.
- Progressively rationalize the electrical distribution system so that overhead wires are eliminated.

- Reinvigorate dormant land downtown by facilitating its sale to local residents.

That's some of the backlog, but lets get on to the main job of preparing for the future. Lets look first at the big question - How do we stop the violence in our inner cities? That's the big question that everyone asks. Well, I think that we can eliminate violence downtown and while we are at it - in the whole society. To believe this is not as naive as it sounds.

Remember earlier when I suggested that we try to understand the problem by studying the questions we ask - Well lets look at this big question. First of all, we turn individual human acts into an abstraction which is greater than us and then scare ourselves out of our wits. Then we get defensive about it. What we call violence is individual human acts and if you cant deal with an abstraction you can deal with people. The violence is the activity of people who don't seem to be intrinsically more evil than we are. I propose that we accept that the life that these people live is our responsibility and that we begin a solution by accepting personal responsibility for our children who live in these communities.

I don't mean this as an abstraction, I mean that in addition to personal action, we take collective action by rebuilding our education system so that it nurtures in addition to educates. To do this, I suggest that we build a system where each child can be given individual, attention.

Did you know that the school which serves most of the children of Southside and TelAviv is an all age school with an average class size of 80 children per class. That's right 80. It has children from six or so up to 17. I don't believe it either, and although my figures are technically correct, I think that the reality is that most of the children don't go to school so that the actual functioning class size is probably less. I don't think that we can take much comfort from this explanation. We do this to these children as quietly as we dump the sewerage in the harbour. We do it every day and we should realize that it is unjust and doesn't make sense.

I suggest that we begin by eliminating "All Age" schools in downtown. That we establishing in their place that uniform education system that so many of our teachers have wanted for so long. That we reduce class sizes to a maximum of 1 teacher to 25 students - yes lower than even their targets because we must do this until the murder rate drops to an acceptable level. This cant take less than 20 years, the time it takes to grow a new crop of twenty year olds who have been purposefully nurtured by us to achieve more than we have. We cant write off the children we now have, but must accept that we have handicapped them as certainly as if they were blind, deaf or dumb.

Those who think that you can shortcut this process by replacing the people downtown with better ones or that you can flog Jamaicans into being decent people must be re-programmed. This may take longer than 20 years for our desire to be like our masters is a part of our heritage.

I think that one of the sad intellectual mistakes of our society is our confusion of rights with opportunity. You can legislate Rights but you have to build Opportunity. Opportunity is not only

what's there for the taking but what handicaps you enter the game with.

I think this taking of individual responsibility would move us along a little. I think we should then look for more problems; The problems and responsibilities of a Just society. Lets dream a little about KINGSTON'S FUTURE:

An un-just social order is just not rational. Justice is not just a nice idea, it works for everybody, and is fair to everybody. That's why they call it Justice. It is no more rational to expect Aristotle's husbandmen to support the other two thirds of the population while occupying one third of the land than it is to expect a relatively small portion of the Jamaican society to create enough wealth to trickle down to the masses. Jamaica cannot be built from the top down. I don't see much sense in speculating about the future for which we are now heading. That future is here. Soldiers with M16's and armored troop carriers to guard downtown thru Christmas. Security fences around supermarket parking lots. A full body search including metal detector to get into happy hour at a night club. (Remember the good old days when we used to cry over the fact that you had to grill your veranda. We should have corrected the course then.) If we hold our course we will raise all of this to a new height.

Lets hope that these days will get to be known as "the bad old days" and lets start to establish a foundation for the next three hundred years of our descendants. Three hundred years ago John Goff intentionally did this. He did not however have the burden of Justice. John designed a city for a colonial society based on slavery. The mass of Jamaican people did not have access to it until after emancipation. The city changed little in its first 150 years and only seems to have begun to feel real pressure when it had to deal with the beginning of the development of a Just society. If emancipation was the beginning of the first phase of this development, then the withdrawal of the British should have been the beginning of the second. Lets say that our failure up to now was the "newness of it all". Lets now accept that it is our responsibility to build the future.

Lets first look at some of the problems which Justice creates:

In order to accommodate a just society, Kingston would have to find among many other things: The land to provide a Just School System. The problem with the school I mentioned before, is that it needs less children, not more classrooms. It has about 2500 children and no playfield. It has children from Bull Bay and Spanish Town. Except in special cases, like correcting injustices in separatist societies, children should not use buses to go to school but should walk to schools in their neighborhoods. A parent teachers association of people living in the same community is one of the institutions that builds society. This is not far-fetched, for the base of it is being built even now in Portmore.

We will also need the land to provide a minimum standard of housing for everyone.

We will need the land to develop industry.

I am naive and believe that given a proper education and love, our children will grow to be good hardworking people who will develop commerce and industry from the bottom up. So we will need a lot of space for people to work. Imagine the space needed to employ the mass of Jamaicans in jobs that can support a proper house and food and education standard for their children. I'm not talking just about the unemployed, but about all of the people that are labourers and domestic servants. Imagine having to house all the people who would no longer have to leave Jamaica to be other people's menials or disruptors of their societies. Imagine all the jobs needed for all the people who scrape by selling snow cone and bun and cheese in little outlaw shacks along the roads.

Where will all this land for this level of commerce and industry come from?

Luckily, the problem will not have to be solved by Kingston alone, for as the country grows out of the vitality of these people, it will grow all over. The jobs will be in tourism and agriculture and services to these expanded industries outside of Kingston. Montego Bay, May Pen, Savannah-la-Mar and Port Antonio will come into their own as service centers.

We will still have a big problem in Kingston. It seems almost certain that all lands between Kingston and Spanish Town will fill up with housing and Industry. We will have serious development control problems. Someone will suggest the filling of the shallows of Kingston harbour by dredging. The issue of bridging the Harbour will again raise it head. We will have use problems in the Harbour as we will have to provide for bathers, pleasure boating and other water sports and increased shipping and Cruise shipping. Yes, there will be a number of cruise ships at Kingston and Port Royal at any given time.

It is then that we will have a real transportation problem and we will have to not only get enough buses, but use the railway properly and consider a mass transit system for Kingston.

It is then we will have a major solid waste management problem for prosperity breeds waste.

Wouldn't it be nice if these were our problems.

I don't know what you think, but I don't think we are ready for justice - just yet - so at the same time that we build an educated and ambitious future generation, that we build equal opportunity, we must build the institutions to support them. We spend a lot of time fretting about the political system, but our problems are rooted in poverty. Well educated and loved children will not so easily be pawns of seekers of petty power. Our real problem is to make sure that we build a well scaled and healthy set of management institutions. It is popular to believe that this is the job of politicians. Actually, it is the job of Statesmen and contrary to popular belief, politics is not a prerequisite of statesmanship.

A proper urban management system that can oversee the cities growth and manage and protect it in the future is our job. The parts of the problem are clear:

- Planning
- Development Control
- Sanitation
- Sewage
- Parks
- Police
- Education
- Transportation

Don't we have these now? That's a matter of opinion like so many other things in Jamaica. But even if we do have them, they are not firmly based and are not strong enough to withstand our own opportunism. They are not strong enough for our future.

I realize that many of the things I have said relate to national problems. Isn't that interesting? Is it possible that we can't separate one thing from another? Maybe not, but lets take Kingston by itself tonight. When you sleep, dream about the possibilities. Ask yourself, if all that I mentioned were to happen, then what would be the role of Downtown Kingston. I want my descendants 300 years from now to remember me as a part of a society that left them a beautiful city which will be a record of what will then be 600 years of occupation. For the young architects who are here, I think that you should aim to produce buildings for this city that 300 years from now, *your* descendants will fight to protect.

I think that we should remember that no one who has planted a Century Palm in Jamaica could have expected to see it bloom.

Finally:

- You don't build a city - it develops
- It develops "naturally" in that it is restricted by structure and *responsive* to stimuli.
- It is *always* a reflection of our character.
- The Institutions which manage it are the link between its physical structure and its times
- Lastly and not as unrelated as you might think - Personal responsibility is *never* transferable.)

Patrick A.O. Stanigar - March 4, 1996