

5th City Collegium  
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THE 5TH CITY PRESUPPOSITIONS

Address by  
Mrs. Lela B. Mosley

The 5th City Presuppositions are 5, and they are simply means ---operating principles, or intentional serious ways of reformulating a particular area. They can be done in any other area, state, or community. They are both intentional and comprehensive.

These presuppositions were developed out of the corporate struggle to find a realistic starting point to begin work in 5th City. They can be divided into two categories. The first category is the task of building the actual sense of community identity; this depends on a concept of Imaginal Education. The second category deals with the hard-headed job of building a community organization.

The first presupposition is that work must be done in a delimited geographical area, an area that is clearly defined. In order for a strong sense of identity and pride to develop, the area must have clear operating boundaries. Men only live overagainst their raw environment by putting boundaries around their world and ordering the contents within those boundaries. We all know the powerful effect of putting boundaries around things that we consciously or subconsciously claim as ours---like our garden, yard, or fields, or even the animals that are grazing in the fields.

To define a community, you give it boundaries. And within these boundaries are the Nodes, Landmarks, and Arteries or routes. To define these is a symbolic act. And anyone living within the area then has identity; he belongs, has roots.

This is a strategic point, and very important. The only possible way to be responsible for all men in all cities, all states, all provinces, all nations, and indeed the whole world, is to work out of a systematic geographic plan. Working out of occupation will not do it, because people's occupations shift from time to time. For example, how many jobs have you had? These shift like sand in the wind. But a geographical grid grounds a man so that there is no way for him to be lost.

Within the grid, 5th City has 5 subdivisions called Stakes whose boundaries were determined by the natural groupings of people and by thoroughfares and main streets. The Stakes provide the community organization with a basis on which to choose leaders, and provide the individual leaders with a channel to provide for the needs and concerns of the people in the Stake, and to give information about program services. Stake information enables the penetration of the community, and the caring for all the inhabitants. The first intention of the Stakes is to build a core of iron leaders. The suggested size of a Stake is 4 or 5 thousand people, although this must be flexible. This also provides a sound financial base for providing services for each area.

The second presupposition is that you must deal with the depth human problem. The depth human problem in 5th City can be called the "self-reinforcing negative self-image," or the "victim image," or can be talked about as a spirit problem. Mass psychology has taught us that if people are told a

thing long enough and frequently enough, they will come to believe it.

In an article in Scientific American in 1987, James P. Comer of Yale wrote, "The Negro experience has been very different...from that of white minorities in America. The traumatic effects of separation from Africa, slavery and the denial of political and economic opportunities after the abolition of slavery created divisive psychological and social forces in the Negro community. Coordinated group action, which was certainly appropriate for a despised minority, has been too little evident; Negroes have seldom moved cohesively and effectively against discrimination and exploitation. These abuses led to the creation of an impoverished, undereducated and alienated group---a sizeable minority among Negroes, disproportionately large compared with other ethnic groups. This troubled minority has a self-defeating "style" of life that leads to repeated failure, and its plight and its reaction to that plight are at the core of the continuing racial conflict in the U.S. Only a meaningful and powerful Negro community can help members of this group realize their potential, and thus alleviate racial unrest..."

What is true for the American Black man is generally true for depressed people throughout the world. To build an authentic community anywhere, you must take this problem of self-image into consideration as a major factor.

The third presupposition is that the use of intentional symbols is key. Every national, religious, ideological, racial, or cultural movement has depended on symbols. The Catholic Church has used symbols. Each nation has a flag, and other national symbols. Ireland is in a war over symbols,

and so is the Middle East. The importance of symbols is also seen in industries, and in advertising. Commercials stick in our minds because they make use of symbolic power. For instance, the Alka-Seltzer commercial has become a symbol for us, and it keeps popping up everywhere: "I can't believe I ate the whole thing."

There are three kinds of symbols: Myths, Rites, and Visual Symbols.

Myths are stories about individual heroes, peoples or nations; or they can be expressed in the form of song.

A rite, or ritual, can refer to anything from habitual activities or ways of doing something, to a carefully created way of opening and closing meetings, such as the "Drama of Humanness" and the "Drama Of Decision."

Visual symbols include flags, insignia, or documents. The Iron Man statue is an example of a visual symbol in 5th City. You can look at it and be reminded of what you are about.

5th City was designed to use all these symbols at the same time. The relationship between the use of symbols and the process of imaginal education is very close. Imaginal Education deals with the depth human problem of self-image, and with conceptions of a changed and expanded life style. Symbols operate to embody the possibilities of a changed and expanded life style, and to fix these possibilities in memory.

The first three presuppositions have dealt with the task of community identity. The last two presuppositions are more directly concerned with the building of a program of combined community services, the actual structures.

The fourth presupposition is that all the problems must be dealt with at the same time. This is a quiet element. As you know, problems in the ghetto reinforce one another somewhat in the same way as the balance of nature, or the imbalance, is self-reinforcing. Economists see this as the complexity of reviving the inner city, or of achieving "momentum." For example, while on development calls, I have been asked, "Why do you deal with the Preschool or the Health Center first, and then do housing?" But you can't deal effectively with one aspect unless you also are dealing with all the other areas that reinforce it.

the fifth presupposition is that all the age levels must be cared for at the same time. This presupposition is similar to the fourth one, because it is based on the wisdom that problems reinforce each other, and that the attitudes of the various age levels within a community also reinforce each other. For example, to set up a Preschool without setting up Jets or Elders or a Stake and Guild system would be ineffective. An effective curriculum, or life journey, must be built for all ages. And the curriculum for each age level must be designed to accomplish the same meaning, so that each person's journey is a spiral of learning. All ages must be sensitive to the needs of one another. The Stakes are important in reaching all the people of all ages in a community.