PIA2020 Midterm Essay

Note:

A great website for learning about writing an essay is <https://www.umuc.edu/writingcenter/writingresources/essaywriting.cfm>

Essay C:

The readings in this class have provided valuable lessons and best practices when pursuing an MPA degree with the eventual goal of becoming an urban planner. As I advance in my career it will be critical to keep in mind the ideas of equity, transparency, and coalition building. These have each been prominent in the works of: Lemann, Kafka, and Okrent respectively. These works provide a clear picture of how to act responsibly when in a role serving the public.

Equity is vital when serving the public because the impartial and equal nature of equity provides a sense of predictability citizens can feel comfortable with. However, equity was not a goal being pursued by public officials in northern states in Lemann’s *The Promised Land*. In this book it is seen that a push and pull is working to create the largest migration in U.S. history. The pull aspect was the numerous higher paying jobs as was in the case in Chicago. Despite the apparent benefit, migrating blacks were soon faced with similar conditions to that which they experienced in the south. Racism in the public leadership created policies that led to ghettos. Blacks were not treated as equals and were note well integrated; this resulted in crime and poverty. As Robert Merton, a notable sociologist, says; when people are barred from normal means to attain a good life their rational decision is to turn to crime. This directly applies to being an urban planner because I must take all people into account and be impartial to assure no group is marginalized. Again, Merton points out that if one part of society is broken then society as a whole falls apart.

Similarly, transparency is key to ensuring the public is informed. Kafka’s “The Castle” shows what not to do to keep the public informed. The Characters K observes that important information takes months or even years to get to where it needs to go. Additionally, K offers the mayor help and is denied even though the mayor said he was overburdened with tasks. While the mayor’s government was complex and hard to access, the public remained clueless as to what was actually going on. This made them susceptible to being taken advantaged of and further feeding corruption. The mayor clearly put his self-interest over the public. In the code of ethics for urban planners, it clearly states that the positions main role is to serve the public’s interest. As a planner, I must be transparent with those who will be directly affected by my decisions. This can be done through community review meetings and public hearings. This ensures the public interest is taken into account and that the process is clear to those it affects.

Lastly, Okrent’s *Last Call* plainly shows the power of coalition building. Prohibition would never have come to pass if it were not for the unifying of groups. Despite being faced against enormous liquor interest, urban populations, and well established social norms; the Anti-saloon League (ASL) strategically partnered with the Women’s Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) and nativist to push their agenda. Despite some of their unsavory and racist tactics, the general concept of building a coalition of similar causes is important. For instance this is necessary for urban planners dealing with water management. This issue typically requires private-public partnerships. When designing a streetscape that is prone to flooding, planners can gain support by being more flexible in zoning (i.e. allowing a building to be taller) if the private business implements cisterns and or bio-swales to manage water. This is similar to the partnership between the ASL and suffragist.

In conclusion, to serve the public responsibly in my future role as an urban planner; I must be equitable, remain transparent, and utilize coalitions. Lemann showed how equity, or rather the lack of it, marginalized the minority population and resulted in less than favorable reactions. Kafka’s “The Castle” exaggerated the problems with bureaucracy, but yet it still proved to be a valuable lesson in how transparency can lead to accountability and discourage corruption. Okrent also provided a valuable learning experience when his historical account showed how one small interest can be reach its full potential through coalition building. While pursuing my interest of becoming an urban planner I must strive to be impartial to those I serve, remain transparent to ward off apathy, and make use of coalitions when my causes to serve the public are at odds with more powerful negative interest.