

## An Overall Look:

# City University In Perspective

By **CLARENCE FUNNYE**

### Part IV

At CCNY two thousand police came in. The faculty senate repeatedly called for their removal, and such removal was a basic condition for further talks. An estimated 300 of the 800 regular faculty were on strike in support of Black and Puerto Rican demands.



CLARENCE FUNNYE

Buell Gallagher was forced out and replaced by a 65-year-old professor who is about to retire and readily admits his status as a kind of interim sacrificial lamb (or goat).

The college, the largest branch of CUNY, stumbled on to term's end, which will provide only a short respite, a breathing spell for forces to gather strength for the ultimate conflict which, because of the already charged racial atmosphere, (owing in part to turmoil in secondary schools over decentralization) threatens to dwarf in comparison any previous confrontation in terms of violence and bitterness.

#### Clarence Funnye

The city university, in face of these developments has, with respect to the politicians, chose to pretend they don't exist and with regard to the Black and Puerto Rican community has initiated its standard plan number one.

#### Evasive Action

"When under attack maintain your position and take evasive action." The evasive action comes in the form of press releases and special committee reports on "renewed commitment," etc., etc. The Federal government equivalent is the appointment of a special commission.

The best academic brains were put to work on manipulation of statistical data through "honest" selective emphasis to give the appearance of "great progress." For example, one official CUNY document actually brags that: "The City University now enrolls more Negro and Puerto Rican students than any other institution of higher education in the nation."

A beautiful statement, but aside from being deliberately misleading, is meaningless. Consider North Carolina, a southern state with fewer Blacks (1,120,000) than New York City (1,250,000) but which has over 12,500 full-time matriculating students in senior colleges as against New York City with only 2,250 Black students matriculating in its senior colleges with over 63,000 enrollment, a mere 3½ percent.

In other words, North Carolina, working with a base of fewer Blacks than New York City, is actually matriculating in its senior colleges 10,200 more Blacks than the "liberal opportunity capital of the Western world."

The irony is amplified when one considers that in 1966, an Idea Plan Associates survey revealed that over 80% of New York City's Black middle class are products of southern colleges.

The survey includes all engineers, doctors, architects, lawyers and school teachers currently pursuing their professions and providing a modicum of stabilization in the City's Black community, and contributing to the economic and social viability of the City.

But the irony does not stop there. City University not only excludes Blacks and Puerto Ricans from its urbanization benefits (e.g., as students), it does not even allow them to participate in the higher education industry as professional-level employees.

For example, the English Department at City College has about 120 regular instructors and professors: one of them is Black and the same pattern exists in all other departments (one), Engineering (one), Architecture (none), etc., etc., on and on ad infinitum. City handwringing about "dire implications of population and economic trends in the center city" ring hollow in the face of these disclosures.

#### Recommendations

The following recommendations are minimal:

First, the City, using CUNY, must embark on a deliberate program for immediate urbanization of large numbers of Blacks and Puerto Ricans. This group should be represented in CUNY — Particularly its senior colleges — at least in proportion to its percentage of the secondary school population including private schools — now 40 percent).

Considering the very small number of Blacks and Puerto Ricans who now receive academic high school diplomas, this suggestion demands drastic restructuring of the university's admission criteria, internal academic structure and course requirements.

This would be a very healthy move, affording the university an opportunity to really take from the vast storehouse of knowledge that which is applicable to current and future needs and phasing out that which has just been hanging on (For God knows what reasons) and clearly does not apply.

Secondly CUNY must move rapidly away from the comfortable rhetoric of relevance in which it masquerades as an urban university. It must question (or be forced to question) even the meaning of the basic "middle-class admission card," the BA degree.

It must ask whether an educated trained person must have been processed through precisely the arrangement of lectures and research with the same "residence" requirements it now doggedly holds to. It must reject acquiescence in the face of professional inertia and ask honestly whether, for example, the potential of a teacher of Political Science in today's world is better served by rote feed-back in a year of "courses" on Beowulf and Eliot or a "system of exposure" which assures an understanding of the place of poverty in urban power systems and its relation to a war economy.

This means more than merely adding a course on the military industrial complex; it requires a complete and total reassessment of the role of an urban institution of higher learning and most particularly, the role CU must play in a City destined to be half-white, half-Black, within fifteen short years.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, CU must update its socio-cultural orientation, philosophy and focus from Anglo-Saxon to multi-cultural urban America. The establishment of a first-rate Department of Afro-American Studies, primarily for the education of whites, would be a good first step and should be accomplished at once.

All course presentation must reflect accurately multi-cultural contributions. It is bad enough that few so-called American history books even acknowledge — except in passing — the existence of Blacks during the building of our nation, but for a modern urban university to compound the error and perpetuate this ignorance is criminal.

#### Not Isolated

CU must realize that it is not and can never be, for long, merely an isolated status-generating academic employment base. If its existence is at all justifiable, it will be indicated by the extent to which it educates precisely those groups of citizens whose continued non-education would be most costly to the City.

Wishful thinking aside, blacks and Puerto Ricans are and will be city dwellers whether or not they are educated. Since few are likely to follow whites to the suburbs, on purely a cost-benefit basis, priority educational attention to this group is the City's best investment in its future.

Until the City shows (by development of a sound Black and Puerto Rican middle class) that it is not merely custodian of the poor and powerless, hopes for "renewal" through attraction and holding of the white middle class are destined to failure, no matter what else city planners do.

The rhetorical call for "total planning" has come home to haunt us. Business as usual, however cloaked, has become immoral and the relevance of higher education in New York City and, indeed, the City itself is being subjected to its first real test.

One perceives the coming of a long night at CUNY, but resolute action can bring a quieter, saner dawn. Its failure blooms us all.