

In Memoriam

Remembering Professors Stanley Moses and Bill Woods

“What does government owe the People?”

It was my first day of class after a nine year hiatus as a student, and I could feel anxiety give way to intrigue as I grappled with this question. Professor Moses began day one of “Plans, Policies, and Politics” with a challenge to his students: rethink your understanding of the purpose of American government, and recognize how that impacts your role as urban planners and policy makers

Throughout the semester, we explored various ideas and issues integral to planning, policy, and politics in American history and examined the role of government through each lens. With a focus on institutions and processes, we examined and debated the ideals for American society rooted in the “Second Bill of Rights,” first proposed during President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s 1944 State of the Union Address. 70 years later, we still do not have a government that reflects the vision of FDR. However, as is the story of America, we have made progress. Professor Moses grounded class discussions in measuring that progress.

He led debates over the social contract between government and the citizenry, the untangling of complicated relationships between government actors and private interests, and the influence of institutions, politics, and people. We were forced to confront our own preconceived ideas of what we expected from government through an examination of conflicting values reflected in social and economic issues and the exploration of embattled ideas in the planning process.

Of all of the invaluable knowledge imparted to his students, two key lessons stand out in my mind from the classroom of Stanley Moses.

Be curious. After nearly 20 years on the battlefield of advocacy, policy, and politics, and with a portfolio of experiences ranging from the grassroots to Capitol Hill, I was clear in my own personal learning objective for the

class: to understand familiar issues in a new way. I tackled each assignment with a determined resolve to challenge what I knew, and to make connections between my own lived experiences and academic theory. My reward was tenfold; I left Professor Moses’ classroom with a much deeper and diverse arsenal of knowledge in planning, policy, and politics.

As we collect accolades and battle scars in our respective journeys, we must be mindful that although we may know much, there is always more to learn. As urban planners and policy-makers, we have a responsibility to seek out new and different ways to understand the issues of our fields. It is our curiosity that will lead us to innovative solutions to pressing societal problems, and it is our curiosity that is a key building block for our roles in building healthy, vibrant, and equitable communities.

Be the change agent. When President Franklin D. Roosevelt challenged Congress (and America) to re-imagine the role of government, he knew he faced an unforgiving uphill legislative battle. But he also understood that our original Bill of Rights, focused on individual freedoms, was not enough. In a time of instability, America needed economic security, and his experience leading a nation during a time of war provided him insight into the needs of working people.

Hence, a radical vision was shared with the nation on a Tuesday in 1944. Although FDR died shortly after delivering his State of the Union, his idea was not lost to history. Today, many people enjoy protection in the workplace, such as unemployment insurance, nondiscrimination, and minimum wage, as well as other reforms from FDR such as price controls, fair housing, healthcare, social security, and affordable education, all far-fetched ideas in an America that wasn’t too far long ago. However, “many” people does not include everyone. This is our challenge.

The motto of Hunter College is “mihi cura futuri” (the care of the future is mine).

How fitting then, to house a department that facilitates the learning process of the next generation of urban planners and policy makers. It is not enough to be radical in our vision, we must be relentless in our movement towards progress. In time and with concerted effort, once wild notions can become the standard, and transform not only plans and policy, but people.

To teach is to touch lives. While I was saddened to learn of Professor Moses’ passing, I am deeply grateful for the time I had to study under his tutelage. I will always carry with me the lessons learned in his classroom.

I serve as an adjunct professor teaching “Municipal Government and Public Policy” to union members pursuing their associate of arts degrees. On the first day of class, I smiled as my thoughts flashed back to a time and place where I was on the other side as a student.

Now, I have the honor and privilege of sharing the lessons of Professor Moses with the next generation. I began the class with an inquiry that profoundly challenged and changed my own beliefs that first day in his classroom:

“What does government owe the People?”

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