

Urban

"Environmental programs at America's colleges and universities attract a student body that is predominantly white. Urban high school teachers need to find and encourage talented students, particularly those from the minorities that make up a huge percentage of our cities' populations."

Challenge



Cities hold
the key
to black
America's
future

By **Cornelius B. Murphy Jr.**

February's designation as Black History Month gives community leaders and educators an opportunity to address a pressing environmental issue: the quality of our urban neighborhoods, where the next chapter of black history will be written.



CORNELIUS B. MURPHY JR.

Urban dwellers, who frequently are the under-represented members of our community, contend with some of the nation's nastiest environmental troubles.

Our cities have been left a legacy of "brownfields" sites — environmentally impaired properties that are not being integrated into community development.

Urban neighborhoods, frequently planned by those who do not have to live there, lack the green spaces and thoughtful design that create "a sense of place" and pride in one's community.

Runoff in the form of contaminated storm water and overflow from sanitary sewers is impairing the quality and use

of urban waterways.

Who will solve these problems? Policymakers and business leaders play a role eventually, but scientists and engineers will be the ones on the front lines. They are the ones who must be willing to get their hands dirty testing water in places like Brooklyn's Gowanus Canal. They are best equipped to find solutions to the myriad environmental troubles facing America's cities.

Not just any scientists will do. The most passionate work will not be done by scientists and engineers drawn from suburban environments. They are simply not ready — culturally — to understand the real issues and values necessary to face this task. To really get a grip on these problems, the people they affect and the extent to which they hamper the quality of life for city dwellers requires a diverse group of scientists who reflect the population they are serving.

Too often, well-educated, well-meaning consulting scientists and engineers do their research, suggest some solutions and then move on to another project. They don't live in the community and don't have to live with the results of their work.



John Berry / Staff photographer

A CLEAN, INVITING urban environment like that pictured above, on Syracuse's Midland Avenue, is always within reach. To confront the legacy of blight and environmental damage resulting from under-representation requires a new generation of educated and committed scientists who reflect the population they serve.

