

The Urbanophile Interview: Columbus Mayor Michael Coleman

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Aaron M Renn: Hello. I'm Aaron Renn from the Urbanophile, www.urbanophile.com, and I'm here today with Columbus, Ohio Mayor Michael Coleman. Mayor Coleman, thank you for joining me today.

Mayor Michael Coleman: It's good to be here.

Renn: First, a little bit about Columbus. It's the largest municipality in the state of Ohio. It's about 810,000 people in the city. So it's a big city. In fact, it's the fifteenth largest municipality in the United States. Metro Columbus is closing in on almost 2 million people, making it the third largest in the state and the 32nd largest in the country. It's the capital of the state. It's home to Ohio State University, which has over 57,000 students, making it the largest college campus in the United States. Companies headquartered here include Limited Brands, who are the folks behind Victoria's Secret and a lot of other brands, Nationwide Insurance. There's also a massive J.P. Morgan presence here, with something like 19,000 employees - it's crazy. Unlike your typical Rust Belt city, Columbus has really been thriving. It's been rapidly growing in both population and jobs, and really running to the #1 or #2 largest metro in the Midwest on growth measures, depending on what stat you look at. So it really is a success story, not just in Ohio, but nationally.

Mayor Coleman is a Democrat in his fourth term as mayor, first elected in 1999, and we'll learn a little bit more about him during our discussion. Once again, thank you for taking the time to meet with us today, Mayor.

Coleman: Well, good to be with you, glad to be with you - and good news. A report came out just yesterday saying that Columbus is now the fastest growing city in the Midwest - in the entire Midwest. And we are now 822,500 people. And so one of our goals for the city is that in six years that within the city limits will be one million people.

And you know, does population matter? I think it does. Because what I've learned in my fifteen years as Mayor is that the growth cities are the growth cities. They're the cities where people come to, to establish a good life, a good quality of life. They're cities that have great opportunities, and Columbus is now the leading city in the entire Midwest for population growth, and the rapidity, the rapidness of it. So now we're 822,000 people. So I'm proud of that. Population does matter, because it's the measure - and the growth of population matters - because it's a measure of people coming to your community because of great opportunities. And that's what's happening in our city.

Renn: I agree. There's a lot of people who like to talk about "growth without growth" and measuring things like, "Well, we're getting smarter." Or, "Our incomes are going

up.” I think growth is an important story. Nobody who has growth ever doesn’t brag about it. You know what I mean? I think growth matters, it matters.

You were raised in Toledo.

Coleman: Yes.

Renn: You went to school in Cincinnati and Dayton, you ran for statewide office as the running mate of a guy from Cleveland. And now you’re Mayor of Columbus.

Coleman: Yes.

Renn: You don’t just know the city. You know Ohio. So what makes Columbus distinct within the state of Ohio?

Coleman: Well, you know, it’s interesting, because Ohio, the great state that it is, is in many ways troubled. And I think many of the cities are part of that Rust Belt mentality around the state. And they’re all great cities. I have nothing negative to say about any of the cities in Ohio. But the truth is that they’re part of the Rust Belt. And Columbus really isn’t. Columbus is an anomaly in the state of Ohio. While all of the other major cities in Ohio are decreasing in size and population, increased poverty, all those things that are representative of a Rust Belt city, Columbus is just the opposite. We have a tremendous amount of young people that have moved into our community. Our average age I think is somewhere around 33 or 34 years old. We have gone from a brain drain city to a brain magnet city. And economic growth has been incredible. We’ve had 40,000 new jobs in the past three years. And it’s a city that really is different from the rest of the state. And I think if you look at the state economy, there’s one major pillar in the state economy – and it’s the city of Columbus.

Renn: It’s clear that Columbus is outperforming the state, the other communities in the state, by a mile. But Columbus didn’t have a lot of those historic assets that say, a place like Cincinnati did, which was a colossus of a city in the 1830s. So it’s sort of a newer, more 20th century city in terms of its growth. So what is different about Columbus? What’s the secret sauce that let you grow so fast and be the outlier?

Coleman: Well, that’s a good question, and it’s not an easy answer. It’s a combination of things. It is that Columbus happens to be the center of government, but that doesn’t mean you’re the center of everything else. We’ve become the center of communications, the center of politics every year, a major university – this is a place where technology thrives, and it just thrives, our city.

And it’s not all by accident or location; it’s by effort. We have developed a lot of strategies over the years to really focus on building our assets, focusing on our assets. We have so many assets that we just continue to build on them, and we’ve been successful.

A lot of cities have one or two industries in their community. I'll use Pittsburgh as an example. Pittsburgh is a great city. But historically, they had the steel industry. When the steel industry left and declined, it left the city and the city declined with it. In the city of Columbus, on the other hand, we have multiple legs to our economic stool. There's no single industry that's more than ten or fifteen percent of the total industrial package. So when one leg of the stool is broken, the other legs hold up the community. We have a very strong financial environment with insurance companies, banks, we have automotive industry here as well, it just goes on and on and on. It's sort of like a mutual fund in some ways, that rather than buy one stock and that's all you have, one or two stocks, you buy multiple stocks, multiple growth rates, and whole fund grows faster as a result, and you have a better return on your investment as a result.

Renn: A critic of Columbus might say of course it's doing great, it's the state capital, it's got Ohio State University, so they're living large off everybody else's money. And I've heard people say that in Ohio, and I'm sure you have, too. So how do you respond to those critics in the rest of the state?

Coleman: Well, I'm not sure if it's critics or envy. I love having Ohio State University in our city, and I love having the state of Ohio's center of government in our city. But here's the downside of that, you know? You know the good side, there's always a downside. We felt that this past recession, when the state government – when there's a bad economy, state government is the first thing that begins to cut. So the state employees in the City of Columbus went from here to there overnight. And when you're an income tax city, that begins to impact your bottom line when there are fewer incomes to tax. So it has a significant impact. In fact, government doesn't grow like it used to. In fact, government is declining in terms of its own employee piece.

In addition, not all land is taxed the same. So the more non-profit land you have, the less tax that comes from it. Some cities around the country that have capitals and major universities complain about it, because they're not getting the taxes from it, because their lands aren't taxed at that level. Around the nation – we're no different. But I think in total, I'd much rather them be here than not.

We are the center of government; I'm proud of it. We're the center of statewide politics; I'm proud of it. In fact, we're the center of presidential politics. I'm proud of that as well. Just in 2012, last presidential election, the presidential candidates and their running mates came to Columbus seventy-seven times, the most of any city in the nation outside of New York City.

Renn: I did not know that.

Coleman: The reason is because Columbus is the center of the state. It influences the state politics. And as you know, you can't win the White House unless you win the state of Ohio.

Renn: More moderate politics here, too, versus the very liberal Cleveland and very conservative Cincinnati.

Coleman: Yes. I would call Columbus progressive, a progressive city, as opposed to moderate. We have a very strong LGBT community, the second largest in the nation next to San Francisco. We have a 100 percent score on the equity index measured by the Human Right Campaign. So we're progressive. I don't categorize us – Columbus is difficult to categorize, to label. Because we're progressive. That doesn't mean liberal or conservative. It means we're forward-thinking and we're open, a very open city. So it's the kind of city, and the reason why our population growth is so significant, it's the kind of city where you can achieve the American dream easier and faster. That's why I came here from Toledo, Dayton, Cincinnati. I spent some time in Washington DC as well. Because I had a sixth sense back in 1980 that there would not be the glass ceilings that you would experience in other cities. And I think that's why a lot of people come to Columbus. Because your dreams can come true. The opportunities are there. That is a reality about our city, unlike many other cities in the Midwest.

Renn: What does Ohio need to do to bring the rest of the state up to Columbus' level of performance?

Coleman: Well, I'll tell you what one blogger said about the state of California. Recently, I'd say within the past three months, a blogger in California said to the Governor of California, "Go to Columbus to learn how to create jobs. Go to Columbus to learn how to develop a vibrant economy." And, "California come to Columbus." I thought that was a pretty good compliment. I'm proud of it.

What does the state need to do to be more like Columbus? Well, I think the state is making progress – and I believe it's largely because of Columbus. I know this past election in 2012, and even this year's election, the politicians, whether they be presidential or statewide, will take credit for the turnaround in Ohio. There is a turnaround happening in Ohio. A writer from the New York Times did an analysis of that – New York Times Magazine, Matt Bai is his name. And in that article he said that the turnaround in Ohio – there was a debate, and the debate still exists, that it was Obama's policies on the automobile industry that started to affect the turnaround with the automobile companies in Ohio. Then we had a governor who said no, it's the governor's policies that are helping to affect the turnaround in Ohio. This writer said yes, it's a little bit of Obama and a little bit of the governor, but it's a large bit of the state's City of Columbus – and the Mayor of Columbus is deserving as much credit, if not more, than the other two, for the entire state. That was a hell of a compliment! I was proud to see that. I can show you that.

So what does Ohio need to do to be more like Columbus? I think be progressive, a lot more progressive than what it is. I think the state legislature is a pretty conservative body. I think, to some extent, they're pro-business, but when you're not pro anything else it frankly impacts the business development in a state. We're very pro a lot of things in this city. We're pro-business. I'm a pro-business Democrat. I believe in the creation of jobs

and the quality of jobs. It's part of what I do every day. I view myself as the top economic development officer for the city of Columbus. So we're very pro-business, pro-development. But we're also pro other things. I'm pro-gay rights. I'm pro-reasonable, rational gun control. I'm pro-human rights and human dignity. You add that mix together, of good jobs with a good life, it really makes for a vibrant economy.

One of the things that was a difference for the city of Columbus a while back was our income tax increase back in 2009. Now some people might criticize me for encouraging taxes -- some have failed and some have passed in the past -- but that one tax was the one that made the difference for our community in many ways. The philosophy at that time, back when the country was in the longest and deepest recession it had experienced since the Depression -- including the State of Ohio, including the City of Columbus -- was, "Are you crazy for wanting to increase income taxes in the city of Columbus?" In fact, I heard some people say, "You're going to drive off business in the city." And we heard from statewide folks, "If the state did that, businesses would leave the state of Ohio - like that [snapping fingers]."

So after some major cuts of \$100 million, changing things we'd done, huge budget cuts in the City of Columbus -- and the public felt those cuts; they saw it in the streets; they saw it in their homes; they saw it in the community -- there was a realization in Columbus that, you know what, no one likes taxes, but we really like our quality of life. And so what happened was, the business community rather than leave the community, helped support and fund the campaign for a voted income tax. Now mind you, at that time, we were in a very deep recession -- high unemployment, high level of misery in the state and locally -- and for people to vote for an income tax increase at the highest time of distress in the community, was a feat unlike I've ever seen in this community, in any community. And the business community supported it.

Renn: Is that part of what makes Columbus different, the population willing to support those types of measures, whereas the rest of the state isn't?

Coleman: Well, we have a very smart population in Columbus, very bright, they're very discerning. And they've not supported some tax increases. So our folks, they were able to discern as to what's right for them and what's wrong for them at that time. We recently lost a couple of tax increases. I'll look back on it and say, "Hey, it makes sense. I get that. I understand why those lost." This is the one that passed, and this is the one that made all the difference.

Renn: Did it preserve your services, or...?

Coleman: Preserve services. We were at a point where we were going to have to lay off 500 police and firefighters. At that time we cut all kinds of things, like trash, leaf pickup, we closed recreation centers, we had significant layoffs, we had furloughs -- we cut dramatically all over and everywhere. And the community said we want a quality of life. Those things are important to us. And once you cut safety, and crime becomes rampant in a community, you cannot come back for a long time. When the community isn't safe, you

can't create jobs, you can't have parks, you can't have bike paths. None of those things can happen if the quality of life in the community is declined dramatically. So the community made a choice at that time to preserve the quality of life. And this made a difference. If we had had those cuts, if that income tax did not pass, you wouldn't be sitting here today talking about the vibrancy of our city. You'd be talking about, what are you going to do about bringing the city back from the depression it's in, the distress it's in? And it would be like a lot of Midwestern cities that frankly are struggling, that are struggling beyond all measure.

Renn: So you think that's the sort of thing the state needs to adopt, that mentality of...

Coleman: Being progressive. You can't be pro-business and not be pro anything else. I'm pro-business – unabashedly. Good jobs, business expansion, it means all the difference in the community where income tax is the driver of services and your budget and the vibrancy of the community. But you have to think two sides of that coin. One side is development of jobs, the other side is development of place – quality. What are the amenities? What are the things that people want to have in their state or their community that enhance its viability and its vibrancy?

A few years ago I said we're going to build a hundred miles of bike paths. Well, we've exceeded that. Don't you know that's all I hear about sometimes, some neighborhoods: "Man I like those bike paths." We're building more this year and will complete a loop at the end of this year. But I never thought twenty years ago, when I first entered politics, that bike paths would be all that cool. It is now like, I can't go anywhere, people saying, "Great on those bike paths, we love them!" So I ride on bike paths myself, because I'm a biker myself, and there's thousands of people on them. Thousands! Thousands! And they meander through neighborhoods and throughout downtown -- people love it.

So it's a combination of things. You got to be pro more than just business. You got to be pro-quality of life. What does that mean to a state? What does that mean to a city? And identify what those things are – and don't be anti-everything. The state legislature – anti-everything. Another big piece is education, which is one thing we've got to work on.

Renn: Unlike states like Illinois, Georgia, Colorado, which are dominated by one big city, Ohio is urban but it has a lot of fairly sizable cities. Cleveland, Cincinnati, Columbus obviously, but also Toledo, Dayton, Akron, Canton, Youngstown. What kind of dynamic does that create in the state, and what do you see the city of Columbus' relationship being with its urban peers, and also with state government?

Coleman: The dynamic of the state. What is very unusual – even in Indiana, the main city is Indianapolis.

Renn: That's it.

Coleman: In Ohio there are a number of great cities, great urban centers. It makes us unique. It's amazing, though, that the gross economic impact of these cities are huge in the state of Ohio, but we're not treated that way in the state legislature. It's interesting.

In between the cities, it is as rural as it is in Alabama. So frankly, our legislature, frankly is a rural legislature. Even though it has some of the top cities in the country in one state. So it's a pull and tug with the state legislature. It's difficult to get acknowledgment and the level of support we need from the state to our urban centers. And it's been a struggle. I'm in my fifteenth year as Mayor. That has been consistent throughout my years as Mayor. And I think you can hear that from every single major city mayor in the state of Ohio, Republican or Democrat.

Renn: Are the urban delegations in the state house and urban mayors working on the same team to try to get that changed? Or is it more elbowing for a bigger share? How does that work?

Coleman: Well, first of all, they're all in the minority. The state urban delegation is in a minority. So no matter what they do, it doesn't have a great impact because we're substantially outnumbered. So I can't give you what would happen if they were in the majority. I know they all talk the right things, say the right things. Sometimes there is competition between areas, Cleveland versus Columbus, Toledo versus Dayton, whatever. That does exist just like it exists in any state. But the reality is the urban delegations are in the minority. And until you're in the majority, there's not much you can do. That's the reality. You've got to count your votes. That's old time politics.

Renn: Columbus is the largest municipality in the state. But really historically Columbus has kind of been the third city, if you will, of Ohio. Cincinnati and Cleveland were much more nationally prominent cities. Now to be fair, that's not always for good reasons. Your river didn't catch on fire. That's probably not a bad thing. When you say Cincinnati, you say Cleveland, everybody in America knows who you're talking about. When people say Columbus, they almost always put that comma Ohio after it. I know that's been a source of frustration that your city is not as well known as some of those other ones, you want to be more on a first name basis around the country. What do you see the brand of Columbus being, and how do you take Columbus' national perception to the next level as a city?

Coleman: Let me kind of answer that question in phases. First of all, I think you're right. I think the Ohio though is dropping. When people say Columbus, they now know who Columbus is. But historically, you're correct.

I look at cities in this way. I look at cities divided in the nation in two categories: the cities of the 20th century and the cities of the 21st century. And Columbus is squarely a city of the 21st century. There are many cities in America whose renaissance was in the 20th century. That's the history of their city. They had football teams, basketball teams, an industry or two, that helped drive the American economy for a full 100 plus years. Now we're still in the infancy of a new century, only fifteen years into a new century,

and we have 85 years to go. I think a lot of cities around the nation are in that 20th century realm.

We're a city of the 21st century. So we don't have a football team, we have hockey and soccer. We don't have one industry, we have fifteen. Which fifteen would you say is the most recognizable, the thing you put your hat on? Well, would anybody say fashion would be? Absolutely not, even though we're the third most important fashion city in the nation. Why would you say that? Well, we have Victoria's Secret, Abercrombie & Fitch, Limited, as well as a few other national brands right here in the city of Columbus. We have more fashion designers in this city than anywhere in the country but two cities, New York and L.A. Folks are shocked to hear that. But the truth is, that's an area where we excel, we excel in that area, as well as many other areas. So I just reflect upon that. So as we move forward – what was the questions you were asking?

Renn: How do you take the brand perception of Columbus to the next level? To really achieve your – you're proud of what you've accomplished, you want to get the recognition.

Coleman: I think it's a multiple strategy approach. Now some people might disagree with this, some people might say it's about the slogan. I say slogans are BS. You know what that means, right?

Renn: Yeah.

Coleman: You don't need a slogan. You need experience. You want to relay an experience. And the hard thing about Columbus is there's multiple, solid experiences in our city that are valid and meaningful to the 21st century. Again, fashion, who would have thought? Now a brain magnet city, who would have thought? The largest city in the state of Ohio – by far. The next largest city is less than half our size, Cleveland. Who would have thought? That's why we work really hard on a multiple strategy approach. One of them is really going to hit, and you've got to just keep going.

People are asking, "Why am I working hard to get Democratic or Republican convention in the City of Columbus? That's just nothing but a hassle." The reason is there's this glass ceiling out there, and we've got to break through. We may or may not get a Democratic convention or a Republican convention, but to be considered, and to be viewed differently in the process, is important. Now we're probably an underdog in that regard, but if we get a convention in this city, it will change the perception of this city for generations.

We're starting to engage more in sports. Indianapolis made a determined effort to go after sports. I pat them on the back, because that was frankly a great idea. We are too, beyond Ohio State. We've got to do more than Ohio State football. We have the All-Star Game in hockey next year. We're really competing for the women's Final Four and some other things that are happening. They are starting to happen. But we've got to keep fighting for it. We've got to keep trying to break through that glass ceiling.

We want to be known as well as a city for opportunity. That's sort of happening without a marketing effort around it. It's happening because people are figuring that out. We're turning into an immigration city. People are coming here from Africa, from Mexico, from the Caribbean, in untold numbers, because there's opportunity here, unlike in many cities around the country.

One idea is to say look, you've got to keep talking about your assets. Some of them are going to stick, but you got to keep going. I'm not into slogans, you know? I'm not into it, I don't think it makes sense, you have to live by your slogan. I say live by your experience. In the 21st century it's going to be more about experience than it is about advancing a marketing slogan or campaign. It's the experience that the city brings, and the actual reality of it. So the more we express our experience, the more the reality of our city becomes real, the more we'll be known for those things.

And it depends on who you talk to. The young generation, the Millennials, view Columbus as one of the coolest places in the country. You can do everything you can do on the East Coast or the West Coast, but for a lot cheaper. Everything – from housing to a cool downtown, to housing downtown, to activities, to outdoor activities, all those things that Millennials are demanding in their environment, without the expense. For the technology operations, same thing. So I guess I boil it down to stay away from slogans, focus more on experience and...

Renn: Execution?

Coleman: Experience, execution and reality. What was that slogan we had I think like forty years ago? "Come to Columbus to Discover America." What the heck does that mean?

Renn: All lot of these civic slogans, it's like "first do no harm," you know what I mean?

Coleman: Our best spokespeople are the people that come and experience the city, and those who live here. So what we've developed is an ambassador program in our city. If you look over my shoulder in that corner, there's a little certificate, and that certificate is we actually go out and we educate our own public on how dynamic the city is – and we test them. Their job is to go out and be the city's ambassadors. And so I took the test, I got 100 percent.

Renn: It's a certificate of completion?

Coleman: A certificate of completion, right over my shoulder, right there. We've had a thousand people. The best marketing tool you could ever have is people. So we're doing that. We're also marketing the campaign and all that stuff that we do, which we got to step up on, frankly spend more resources on. But that's something we focus on.

Renn: I live in Indianapolis, which in a lot of ways is like the twin city of Columbus. There are some important differences, but there are just a lot of similarities. So I have a couple kind of compare and contrast questions on the cities.

One of them is like this ambassador program, it gets there. In Indianapolis there are people who say we don't want to be called Naptown anymore. But I'm convinced nobody outside Indianapolis ever called it Naptown, because nobody cared enough to even bother insulting the place. And it's similar when I've talked to people in Columbus, I've repeatedly heard, "We don't want to be called 'cow town' anymore." I'm like, cow town? I've never heard this thing called cow town, other than by people who live here – and it's not a cow town, by the way.

Coleman: But that the mentality we grew up on.

Renn: We have this thing like Midwestern self-disparagement. How do we overcome that to become more proud of who we are?

Coleman: Well, that is a very good point. Because the truth is, there are some folks in this community that at one point viewed ourselves as a cow town. And for me, that's a dirty word. So I had a strategy that we executed, and it worked great. It was our bicentennial, 2012. In 2007 I pulled the community together. We had the largest town hall meeting in the history of the universe at the convention center. We had a couple thousand people. We brought a couple thousand of our residents into the convention hall and we spent time on what we want to do. I had a mission; my mission was to help change the mentality of how we view ourselves. Because you can't market yourself until you view yourselves a certain way. So what I started talking about then and I still talk about today is, this city needs to continue with a sense of modesty, but not modesty to a fault. Because frankly, we should have a sense of what I call swagger. And I've written articles on it. I've written op-eds on it. We've done all kinds of stuff, speeches all over the city – is that this city needs to have a sense of swagger. Because we have so much to offer, so much we've accomplished, and we need to feel that when we go on that football field we can win. And we got to walk, we got to talk, we got to feel as if we have swagger. And I pushed it hard. And frankly, I think that effort has changed how we view ourselves.

So I had the bicentennial in 2012, and that was a time to brag about the city. And boy, did we brag. We talked about ourselves, how great we were, what we did, every neighborhood. We raised \$2 million in the private sector for a campaign designed to change how we view ourselves, so we can then start talking about ourselves to others. And man, that was extraordinarily successful. In fact, I'm going to give you a book, *Revealed: Columbus*. I had songs. Do we have any CDs left?

Tyneisha Harden (Mayoral Communications Coordinator): Possibly.

Renn: You put out a CD and a book?

Coleman: CD, book, commemorative coin, we had every neighborhood celebrate the greatness of what that neighborhood was all about. We had videos. We had a giant party, I had a State of the City address that had like 3,500 people at it, with choirs. I mean, it was like, 2012 was all about changing who we are, transitioning from what we thought we were to what we really are, and to what we will be in the future. 2012 was a milestone for the city of Columbus. It was our 200th year anniversary. And I milked it for everything we could to transform how we thought about ourselves, and it made all the difference in the world. We invested \$2 million of marketing ourselves to ourselves. And it was all raised in the private sector. It was a high point of this city in many ways, because I insisted that we need to have some swagger in this world. Here's why: we went through all the good stuff. We had almost 300 events throughout the city. We had all the television stations, radio stations participating in something related to the swagger we're trying to develop. It was a huge, important effort that made a difference. The corporate community came up, they wrote checks. We spent very little taxpayer dollars on it. But it's made all the difference in the world to us in how we view ourselves.

So the next step is now that we view ourselves as a city of accomplishment, a city of the 21st century, a city of quality of life, that we're big as anybody else – not necessarily in size but in the mentality of how we view ourselves – we need to start going for things like the Democratic National Convention. We need to start going for things like the Women's Final Four. We need to start stepping it up, and not just talk the talk, but act it: walk the walk.

Renn: Another parallel with Indianapolis: it's the month of May and the Indianapolis 500 – it's almost here. The Indianapolis 500 is almost here. You talk to people in Indianapolis, today they don't really talk about the race as being central to the city's identity or marketplace presence, even though it's the one thing that indisputably puts Indy on the map. And I always wondered why it's kind of been downplayed recently. I think part of it is you don't want to be a one-trick pony. Auto racing can be a little déclassé, shall we say, to the urbanist elite.

But in a similar sense there's one thing everybody knows about Columbus and that's Ohio State University Buckeye football. And yet it seems like I don't hear about it from people here – they'll tell me about Columbus all day, regale me with how good it is, but nobody will talk about Buckeye football. Is Columbus, like Indy, maybe neglecting its one brand asset in the market?

Coleman: No. There was a time in the 60s and 70s and the 80s, and even the 90s, where Columbus was nothing but Ohio State football. And I love the Buckeyes; I love the football team. It's better than any professional team in the state of Ohio. And they're still amateurs. That's good. But having said that, Columbus is no longer just the Ohio State football team. We don't view ourselves that way anymore. But we do not discard the importance of The Ohio State University.

The fact of the matter is Ohio State University is one of the leading research institutions in the world. It attracts 56,000 students into the city of Columbus every year. It is a place

where young professionals, the future young professionals of our city, begin. And so we view Ohio State differently, the same that it's important, but differently as to what is important. So the way I view it is, the football team's great, we love it. I go to every single game. All of us are at the stadium, we're cheering, we're screaming and hollering, loving every minute. I go talk to the players. But you know what's really important? It's the fact that they create research that is transformed into profits, that is transformed into businesses, that is transformed into jobs. It creates young minds into young professionals that buy homes, that start families, and start businesses in the city of Columbus. We view it differently – and we still love The Ohio State University. So as I and this community embrace Ohio State, we're not embracing just the football team. We're embracing all the economic vitality that Ohio State brings to the city of Columbus, which is huge. And they've become part of the economy of our city, and not sitting out somewhere on Saturday morning, Saturday afternoon, is the only thing we do. The neighborhoods around The Ohio State University, they've have been transformed into these exciting, glorious places where young people and folks that live here and folks that visit here love to go, good places to be. Parts of it become research parks where technology can boom and businesses can be started. The medical center and the cancer institute, with some of the finest minds in medical research of the entire world, are happening in our city. That we can leverage some of the assets of the campus into some of the poor areas of the city of Columbus, and use it to help transform those areas as well. So we do not discount Ohio State, we embrace it, but we embrace it holistically and comprehensively, not just the football team.

Renn: There were a couple parallels to Indy. I want to give one contrast. When I look at Columbus and I visit here, I just see a place, that maybe with the exception of a major transit investment, you are hitting every box of what people say, “This is what a city ought to be doing.” It's clear the city gets it, and all those things are being executed at a pretty high level. Bike share, car share – your car share program's great – what you're doing over on the river. So the basics are great.

On the other hand, as an outsider, I haven't seen anything that's really “blinded me with science,” like the “wow factor” that's really like, something's happened in Columbus that's like a truly innovative game changer that would put you on the map. Whereas I think Indy is the inverse of that, where the basics are pretty done poorly in Indy in my opinion, but they've really focused on things like the sports strategy, or like the Cultural Trail that they've put in downtown, which is an entirely different, new kind of bike infrastructure that other places are now looking to copy. Things like hosting the Super Bowl really put them on the map. Is this something Columbus needs to focus on? Can really create that brand presence in the market? When you look at diverse businesses, you don't have the one industry. Do you really need to create a claim to fame or one big thing that you're known for, as opposed to all this collection of like really good, but not necessarily individually compelling parts?

Coleman: Well, that's a good question, and that's a struggle we have. When you have so many great assets, and you have so many wonderful children – you're the father, the mother, the parent and you happen to have fifteen children, they're all great, which one

will you embrace more than the others? And that's a hard thing to do. Am I going to take the oldest, am I going to take the youngest, am I going to take the one in between? And that's the struggle we have, and I recognize that. So the question is, then, if you can't pick which one of your children you want to put out front, you want to put all your children out front. Then it becomes, well, who's your audience? So then maybe that's part of the new strategy for the 21st century: who's your audience? If your audience is young people – and frankly that is an audience for us, that's a group of people that we care about, the young professional, the Millennials – then we're going to develop strategies to put our youngest of our children out there to show how great they are.

Something can be said with not just – I haven't answered the question, I'm contemplating it, thinking out loud – something can be said about not just picking one of your children and saying, "That's it. That's who we should be known for," but putting all your children out. Each one has a great skill. One's an artist, the other's an engineer, and they all do great things. They do wonderful things. So it might be who you're talking to, who's your audience? I think in this new world in front of us, our audience isn't just one audience. Our audiences are many. And as you look at technology change, I think there's something can be said about the idea that a strategy that incorporates multiple messages among specific audiences is going to make a difference.

And is it? Well, it might be. Who else is growing faster than Columbus? You tell me. Nobody. Who else's economy is as strong as Columbus? No one. I think something can be said about the idea of marketing to who your audience is. If it's the big thing, something can be said about that, too. So when Super Bowls are no longer important, then what's next? At one time -- I'm just using Indianapolis, and I love Indianapolis, I was born there. I'm a child of Indianapolis. But you just told me, you just told me yourself, that Indianapolis at one time was a city of the Indianapolis 500 and that was their thing. Now you're saying well, it's not anymore. And you're saying Super Bowls are. You had that one Super Bowl, I'm happy for you.

Renn: That's an example.

Coleman: I'm just contemplating, thinking out loud. So we struggle with this very question all the time. Do we have that one thing that we push? Or do we have an experience that can be marketed to multiple segments? Who's our audience?

Renn: I think the knock on Indy would be that so many resources gone into things like Super Bowls that the basics have been neglected. It's crowded out a lot of time, attention, and money that could have been spent on getting the rest right.

Coleman: So the question to me is, should we spend more time on that big thing? And I wonder, which child would I pick? I'm the father, what child would I pick? Of all my wonderful children, and they're all solid assets, solid. Each child can do something very, very well. Why would I pick this child over that one? And that's the question I struggle with.

Renn: Just a couple more questions. You are the first black mayor of Columbus. I think for those of us who are too young to remember the Civil Rights Movement, or busing battles of the 70s and places like that, we can kind of forget that race was really essentially the core of the narrative of American cities through much of the 20th century. So I'm wondering what role has race played in Columbus' historically, and how have you been perceived – you talked about smashing the glass ceiling, you had a sense – how have you been perceived by the broader electorate in this city?

Coleman: Well, I'm now in my fifteenth year. I think I'm the longest serving African American mayor serving right now in the country. And the longest serving mayor in our city. And serving in the country: African American mayors among major cities. And I'm very proud of that.

Renn: This city is less than 30% black, so, you have tremendous support in the white community here.

Coleman: I'm grateful for that, to have supports from all segments of this city, in the African American community, in the white community, in the Latino community, all parts of the city. That's something I'm proud of. When I first became mayor, the only question that was ever asked of me at that time, back in 1999 which was when I was elected, I remember in that first year from 1999 to the end of 2000, national media, everybody: "What's it feel like to be the first African American mayor?" I said well, I'm proud of it, it's something that I care about, but the truth is my ultimate goal is not to be necessarily remembered as the first, but the best – the best mayor of the city. That was my goal then and that's my goal today.

I have always strived to try to be the best mayor I can by representing all parts of this community and look out for equal opportunity for all, whether you're in the black community or the white community, whether you're a Latino, or you're low income, high income – equal opportunity means equal opportunity across the board. And I'm proud of that.

When I first became mayor – and it's the same thing that happened when President Obama became the first – there was a high level of expectation in the African American community, very high level of expectation when the President became President, that things would change like that. And the challenge that the first always has is to make sure they do the right thing for the right reasons, not because of who they are and where they come from. Just to do the right thing every time. You have to prove yourself in that way. So the high expectations I think are still there, and hopefully I'm still meeting them, but I've tried to change the expectations from being just an African American mayor to being a mayor that's good for every part of the city who happens to be African American.

Renn: I want to give you two groups of people. First think of that first generation of black mayors in the United States: Carl Stokes, Richard Hatcher, Maynard Jackson, Coleman Young. And you look at the contemporary group of black mayors, Cory Booker, Michael Nutter, Kasid Reed, yourself. How has black political leadership in

America at the local level evolved over that period of time, both in terms of political governing style and also the public reaction, how the broader public sees them?

Coleman: I think the early mayors, the Carl Stokes, who was all about civil rights and not about much else, and Carl Stokes was – I grew up in Toledo. And I remember when he became mayor of Cleveland. I remember Coleman Young was the mayor of Detroit. Man, we were so proud in my neighborhood about both those individuals. To see an African American become the mayor of a city. And their focus was civil rights. So I think the issues have changed over time. While civil rights continues to be important, people have an expectation that mayors deliver, mayors change the city for the better in every aspect of a community, from jobs, to housing, to streets, to police, to safety, human services, across the – water quality, sewers, potholes. Our role has changed from the singular focus of civil rights, which is important, to be an expanded role that includes civil rights but everything else that we have to change.

Mayors, especially African American mayors, need to be change agents – change agents for their city. I think all the mayors you mentioned are change agents for their cities – in every aspect of city life, not just in one or two. Every aspect. My favorite saying in this city, among my staff, is: the city that stays the same falls behind. And that's a mantra that I have in my staff meetings and around the community. That means, you know what it means. I don't have to tell you, you understand it.

Renn: And it's true.

Coleman: And it's true. The mayor's role, especially African American mayors, because we have an especial burden to really be the change agent, that we continue to change and adapt and make the city a better place to be. We have those expectations and we have to meet them.

Renn: You're also the longest serving mayor in Columbus history. And you're not done yet, but what would you like your legacy to be?

Coleman: You know, I'm going to leave that up to somebody else. That's not for me to determine. I'll leave that up to somebody else, and my expectation is that it will probably be different depending upon who you talk to. I have a long list of accomplishments that are so numerous now it's hard to even talk about – and it's impacted so many people – but legacy will be depending upon what happens after I'm gone. They can decide what my legacy is. I'm not competent enough to know what my legacy will be. It's not for me to decide.

Renn: Mayor Coleman, thank you very much for joining me.

Coleman: Thank you.