



On Being Here with Others: Space, Identity and Justice

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The American Men's Studies Association promotes ethical values of equality and inclusivity across such social barriers as race, ethnicity, and class. I explore two practices, characteristic of hegemonic masculinity—a focus on time as an organizing principle and maintaining an individualist self-identity—that undermine these values. Reflecting on the spatial orientation and communal identities of indigenous peoples, I argue that these provide helpful correctives on the way to more adequate visions of and work for justice.¹

From its beginnings as an academic component of the National Organization of Men Against Sexism and then as it separately incorporated in 1991, the American Men's Studies Association has embraced ethical values promoting equality and inclusivity, seeking "the participation and membership of all men and women irrespective of race, class, ethnicity, sexual orientation, physical abilities, nationality, or religious identity" (AMSA, 2000). As a board member of that organization, committed to inclusivity and equality, and as a scholar and activist in my own community, I have become aware of dynamics endemic to the particular practices and performances of masculinity shaping me that hinder that work for equality and collaboration with others who are on the other side of social barriers erected around race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, physical ability, national identity and religion.

Two particular practices involve the organization of my personal and professional life around the exigencies of time and a habit of thinking of myself primarily as a discrete, bounded individual, rather than as a member of a larger, human group. These two practices shape how I understand my ethical responsibilities in ways that may well deepen chasms between me and those different from me with whom I would collaborate. In addition, they disable me from making significant challenges to the institutionally supported power differentials based on those differences.

These practices initially came to awareness as I began to relate to the Apache of the San Carlos Reservation in Arizona, and they have been explicitly challenged by indigenous perspectives encountered in the course of my teaching. I offer here, several narratives and some initial rumination about the problems these practices cause for both seeing injustice and acting in more just ways. In addition, I want to indicate some directions toward alternative ways of being and acting.

I start with two vignettes.

A few years ago, I took a walk with my graduate school mentor, George H. Williams—at the time he was 82 years old, had served as the Winn Professor of

Ecclesiastical History at Harvard for forty years and had been retired for seventeen. He knew and routinely used more ancient and modern languages than anyone else I've ever known, lectured brilliantly on every period of the history of Christianity, and had the respect, and often the fear, of the graduate students I admired. But he also was one of the most ecumenical, dear spirits I have ever known. His book, *The Radical Reformation*, in 1962 gave careful, meticulous attention to marginal sixteenth century groups and brought them and their ideas, including pacifism, conscientious objection, and the separation of church and state into the mainstream of historical studies. In his fifties, he spent a research leave in Poland and learned Polish, in order to write the sixteenth century story of the Polish Brethren. Late in his career, he considered resigning his academic position to join a group dedicated to save the whales, but was advised he could do more from his academic position of influence, so he continued as a professor. He was not an elitist, distant, isolated academic.

The walk and conversation took place at an academic conference in Fort Worth; he had just given a keynote address. I was telling him about men's studies and a paper I had given on St. Thomas Aquinas. Aquinas, too, was driven, keeping up to four scribes busy as he dictated Bible commentaries, critical editions of Aristotle, sermons, and his magisterial *Summa Theologiae*. Near the end of his life, Aquinas had a mystical experience that led him to stop his feverish work, because, as he said, "all that I have written seems like straw to me, compared to what I have seen." Because the only thing he wrote from then to the end of his life was a brief commentary on the erotic Song of Solomon, I argued in the paper that something, perhaps, got through to him and brought this life-long celibate friar to an awareness of the beauty of the body and the wisdom in listening to it. As I spoke, Professor Williams got real quiet; when I finished, he said, "So, this men's studies approach helps us understand the imperialism of the project?" Stunned, once again, by his acuity and penchant for coining marvelously suggestive phrases, I answered, "Yes, I think so." He looked wistfully off into the distance and said, "Oh, Stephen, I could tell you many, many things about that in my own life ... but I am speaking next week at a conference at Baylor and I must return to my room and work on my lecture." I put my arm around his shoulders and said, "It must be hard to be a Harvard professor." "It is," he responded as he trudged off to the dorm. He couldn't help himself, even as he became aware of his own bondage.

The "imperialism of the project"—that sense that we must do something now, in a hurry before someone beats us to it or we are judged to have come up short—can drive us hurtling into the future. Time, then, becomes a taskmaster or—to follow Professor Williams' metaphor—an emperor, a ruler that commands our attention, energies, and gifts. Those people, places, animals and things around us can get a little blurry and out of focus as we speed from one project to the next.

The second vignette took place during a sweat ceremony on my first visit to the San Carlos Apache Reservation in eastern Arizona. I met Wendlsler Nosie, now the Chairman of the Tribal Council, through John Mendez, an African-American pastor in town. I had asked Reverend Mendez to help me with a workshop on dismantling racism for a group of progressive, mostly white Baptists. Reverend Mendez said, "If we're going to deal with racism, we need to also deal with Native Americans. Let's invite Wendsler Nosie." I said, "Who's Wendsler Nosie?" Reverend

Mendez answered, “He’s a Chiricahua Apache, a descendent of Geronimo at the San Carlos Reservation in Arizona.” Well, Chairman Nosie came to Winston-Salem, spoke of the struggle of his people, and conducted a closing ceremony in one of our classrooms. He invited me to the annual Sacred Run that summer; it is part spiritual discipline, part political drama, part cultural celebration, and part athletic event. It is staged to call attention to the removal of the Apache to San Carlos and to their exclusion from Mt. Graham, the historical center of Apache religious, cultural, and economic life, which is now seventy miles outside the Reservation.

In preparation for the Run, they had a Sweat Ceremony; the ceremony lasts for about three hours, with four sessions interrupted by a swim in the river. At one point in the ceremony each person shares why they have come. When it was my turn, I said, “I have come to see what I haven’t seen before and what many people like me try hard not to see and to recover something I have lost. When I was young, I could look at a tree and feel like we knew each other. I can’t do that anymore and I feel like Wendsler can, and I want to learn how to do that again.”

Well, I saw a lot that week in 2002 and more in the trips I’ve taken since then: San Carlos has a 76 percent unemployment rate with 77 percent living under the poverty line; the Apache and other Native Americans are 48.7 percent more likely to suffer from heart failure, 173 percent more likely to suffer from diabetes, and 44.3 percent more likely to suffer from asthma than the general population; there are also high rates of obesity, alcoholism, and drug addiction; the federal government spends half as much on health programs per tribal member as it does on health programs for other Americans; 39 percent of families live in substandard housing and 40 percent of families live in overcrowded conditions; the average life expectancy for Native Americans is 55, which is lower than for residents of Bangladesh.²

I learned also that, for Chairman Nosie and others of the Apache people, Mt. Graham—its geography, vegetation, animal life, and springs—is at the center of their ceremonial traditions and stories, their food ways, their collective memories, and family histories. In short, Mt. Graham is at the center of their identity as Apache people. Their current physical separation from it continues to inflict harm in a multitude of ways.

The policies of the federal government, until very recently can only be described as systematic cultural genocide, with the effect—at one time or another—of suppressing religious ceremonial life, the obliteration of the spoken language, the forced separation of family members, and the removal from ancestral lands.

Having gone to the Reservation and the Run hoping to recover a lost sense of connection to the natural world, I found it ironic and tragic that people like me (i.e., European Americans) and our government have done so much to destroy the very peoples and cultures that could most help us with the current ecological crisis and our own alienation from so much of the natural world.

Work with the Apache of San Carlos, reading for a class I have taught several times now on Native American ways of knowing, and collaboration around racial divisions in my home of Winston-Salem, North Carolina, have all led to several hypotheses that invite research and reflection on the spirituality of men who share aspects of my social location. Said another way, we need research and reflection on what might be called, “the souls of white folks,” alluding to the magisterial work by

W. E. B. DuBois at the turn of the last century. That is a pretty tall order and I do not think I am up to the whole task, but it needs to be done. These hypotheses and reflections are intended as a small contribution to mapping that larger project. Those hypotheses are:

1. Our hearts and minds have been colonized in an advanced capitalist society in which our production is maximized through a complex and pervasive series of material and social rewards and punishments.
2. One of the means and effects of that colonization is a focus on time as an organizing principle of our public and private lives.
3. This focus on productivity and time can serve to alienate us from the place/space around us and from those with whom we share it and on whom we depend for our lives and flourishing.
4. The effects of that alienation include a diminished ability to know, intimately those things—animate and inanimate—around us with whom we are in symbiotic physical, economic, emotional, and spiritual relationships.
5. That lack of knowledge hinders our recognition of the ethical obligations entailed by those relationships.
6. Further, the unawareness of those ethical obligations, as well as the social isolation produced by an individualist self-perception, leaves us ill-equipped and with insufficient power to overcome, or dismantle, the systemic and institutional racist, sexist, heterosexist, classist practices and their ideological supports that harm others and ourselves.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. (1963) observed that, “we are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny.” To re-state the core of the problem, why is it that many very good people, especially men, simply are not aware that “whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly” so that “injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere” (p. 290)? And, why, when we are able to see injustice, do we find it so difficult to do much about it?

Here, I want to address one aspect of this nexus of dynamics by exploring some of the effects of time as an organizing principle of a hegemonic masculinity, and identify some resources that might be helpful in incorporating an orientation toward space into our ways of thinking and acting.

Space and Time

Visits to the San Carlos Reservation have prompted me to offer a first-year seminar, “Seeing with a Native Eye: Possibilities for Mutual Respect and Collaboration.” Among the native authors assigned are Vine Deloria, Paula Gunn, David Wilkins, and George Tinker. In his recent book, *Spirit and Resistance*, George Tinker (2004)—an Osage—argues:

American Indian spirituality, values, social and political structures, and even ethics are rooted not in some temporal notion of history, but in spatiality. This is perhaps the most dramatic, and largely unnoticed, cultural difference between American Indian thought processes and the western intellectual tradition. *The western intellectual tradition is firmly rooted in the priority of*

temporal metaphors and thought processes, while American Indians inherently think spatially. The question is not whether time or space is missing in one culture or the other, but which metaphoric base functions as the ordinary, and which is subordinate. As noted earlier, American Indians do have a temporal awareness, but it is subordinate to our sense of spatiality, and likewise, the western tradition has a spatial awareness, but that lacks the priority of the temporal. (Tinker, 2004, pp. 105-106; my emphasis)

And,

Western, European, and euro-American cultures—in spite of demonstrable strengths—have a nearly fatal flaw.... While this flaw is most apparent today in political and economic relationships in the world, its underlying sources are the spiritual, theological, mythological, and philosophical imaginations of the West....*I have described these in terms of the overwhelming mythological commitment of the West to individualism and temporality.* (Tinker, 2004, p. 12; my emphasis)

I think he's right about this. As I have said, there seems to be in me, and I assume others, a kind of temporal urgency. That urgency, in turn, can serve to isolate us from those around us, centering our attention on ourselves. Tendencies wound that closely into our minds and bodies must have roots in the stories and worldviews—the “mythological commitments”—that shape us. Tinker accurately observes that a spatial and communal awareness is not absent in western perspectives, as temporal and personal awareness is not absent from indigenous views; however, he believes that the temporal focus and individualism of western ways of thinking are overwhelming.

Rather than focus on the historical, cultural origins of these dual commitments to temporality and individualism—an important task—I want simply to illustrate them with regard to the religious and political polarizations in the US today and comment on one of their most fatal effects. Then, I want to suggest—from my own recent experience—some ways toward restoring more balance in our lives by developing more spatial and communal ways of thinking and acting.

The Priority of Temporality and Individualism in US Christianity

Despite significant differences with one another, the two groups—conservatives and liberals—that dominate US Christianity manifest a common commitment to individualism and temporality, with neither offering much in the way of a vision or motivation toward a transformed world.

Twenty years ago, the sociologist of religions, Robert Wuthnow (1989) observed that the most significant, contemporary theological differences emerged, not between Christians belonging to different denominations—as had been the case historically—but between Christians belonging to the same denominations (pp. 19-38). What Wuthnow sees is a divide between two identifiable groups—conservatives and liberals—with fairly coherent views, contending with each other within denominations and often within individual congregations and families.

On the conservative side of the spectrum, a religious/mythological perspective identifies God as a legislator, sin as disobedience, Christ's sacrificial death as the payment of the debt of human disobedience, salvation as the forgiveness of personal guilt and reunion with God in another world at the end of one's life or at the end of history. Concern about this world, therefore, is limited to a focus on personal morality and the freedom from secular influences that might lead one to violate God's will and, thus, disqualify oneself and others from heaven (Gonzalez, 1999).³

The core values of many conservatives focus on individual, moral purity and an always imminently expected, and welcome, temporal end of the world. The mission for Christians, then, is to get busy eliminating moral stains in their personal lives (e.g., proscribed sexual activity, substance abuse or, even, use, unkindness in interpersonal relationships). In addition, they must urgently spread the message of forgiveness and personal transformation, while pushing back the forces of a sinful secularism, in order to prepare others for a heavenly destiny before the always imminently expected return of Christ.

The religious/mythological perspective of those on the liberal side of the spectrum identifies God as an inexpressible, elusive source of truth, sin as ignorance/obliviousness, Christ as an illuminator, salvation as personal insight and growth into a realization of one's potential. Concern about this world is focused on the conditions necessary for the freedom to reach one's full potential.

The core values of liberals promote personal enlightenment and development toward fuller self-realization through time. The mission, for many liberal Christians, calls on them to get busy with that self-improvement and with pushing back the forces of darkness—including the religion and politics of conservatives—that obstruct the personal freedom to do so.

In the religious/mythological perspectives of both groups that dominate US Christianity, there is little in them to motivate Christians to join hands with each other and those outside the faith in sufficient numbers to do much about the class interests, institutions, and mechanisms of power exercised by the ruling elite in our country. In the meantime those who share those interests, oversee the institutions, and employ those mechanisms lead us toward even more devastating environmental degradation, international isolation and hostility, and domestic, class polarization. In Tinker's words,

What we [i.e., Christians] lack yet today is a creative and powerful theological foundation for the justice we desire. All our churches ostensibly take seriously the scriptural demands for justice, to some extent, yet none of them has provided a persuasive and satisfying means for arguing or achieving the desired results. (Tinker, 2004 p. 104)

This, unfortunately, is not a new phenomenon. Two generations ago, acutely aware of widespread inaction of European and American Christians in the face of the deportations of Jews and others to extermination camps, the German theologian, Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1973), observed, "In recent years we have seen a great deal of bravery and self-sacrifice, but civil courage hardly anywhere" (p. 5). He was puzzled by what it was about the Christian ethos that failed him and many others when

challenged by the Nazi agenda. More recently, responding from the Birmingham jail to the criticism published by eight moderate, mainline white clergymen, Dr. King lamented,

So here we are moving toward the exit of the twentieth century with a religious community largely adjusted to the status quo, standing as a taillight behind other community agencies rather than a headlight leading men [sic] to higher levels of justice. (King, 1963, p. 299)

Temporality and Individualism in US Politics

A similar and, often related, polarization exists, according to Harry Boyte in much of contemporary American politics. In his *Everyday Politics*, Boyte describes two political populisms that dominate the “blue state/red state” landscape today.

Conservatives tend to identify “big government” as the problem and fight, politically, for freedom from its corrupting influence on their pursuit of essentially personal virtues. The rallying cries, then, tend to turn around issues such as abortion, homosexuality, and other issues concerning personal responsibility. An unwillingness to feed “the beast” of government manifests itself in their allergy to taxation. We might add that, in addition to the corrupting influence of “big government” there is the international, terrorist threat of all those who do not share a conservative insistence on democracy (read: individual freedom). Liberals believe that conservatives, particularly religious conservatives are being duped by the representatives of business interests as they manipulate personal, moral issues or peoples’ xenophobic fears. For liberals, the enemy is “big business” and the solution is government—that means by which the common good is advanced—sometimes, when necessary, over the objections of the myopic who cannot see it. Liberals tend to have the sense that the world can be improved through a model of cooperation that seeks to build national and international institutions that “facilitate trade, diplomacy, and security” (Lakoff, 2006, pp. 38-39).

The problems with this approach are several. First, someone else does the facilitation of trade, diplomacy, and security—trained professionals in a bureaucracy. So, citizens remain removed from others with whom they have a “facilitated” relationship. Second, the basis for the unity that transcends difference is often seen as a notion of universal reason. Consequently, liberals lean on the power of persuasion to move things forward, to transform things and tend to get exasperated when those of the Right—or even in the middle—just don’t seem to get it; the sense is that they are more than a little dense. Third, liberals tend to mobilize around big, national problems—the solution of which is in the hands of those who are generally remote from them. So, relatively impersonal (traditional or electronic) petition drives constitute an important strategy. Finally, there are those who either enjoy tension and conflict and those who avoid it at all costs. Those who avoid tension and conflict are, as Dr. King pointed out, love “order more than justice” and end up doing little to change things. Those who enjoy, or have come to accept conflict, can hone a socially and politically “prophetic vision” that can become brittle—more anti-classist than thou; more anti-sexist than thou; more anti-racist than thou; more anti-heterosexual than thou—so that rather than developing a larger and larger net with increased

power to transform institutional classism, racism, sexism, and heterosexism, the group gets smaller and smaller, having alienated allies and potential allies.

Whether shaped by the religious or political right or the religious or political left, many men have been significantly disabled, or put another way, have never developed the capacity and skills necessary to dismantle institutional sexism, racism, heterosexism, or classism. Given these religious and political polarizations and their deleterious effects on a fuller, more comprehensive vision and path toward justice, I found quite poignant the question of a student in the first year seminar I teach on Native American issues. In an assignment we had read a passage from George Tinker (2004):

[Gustavo]Gutierrez, like other Latin American theologians, explicitly and implicitly identifies the preferential option for the poor in terms of social class structure and overlooks the crucial point that indigenous peoples experience their very personhood in terms of their relationship to the land...American Indian peoples resist categorization in terms of class structure. Instead, *we insist on being recognized as "peoples," even nations with a claim to national sovereignty based on ancient title to our land.* (Tinker, 2004, p. 102; my emphasis)

The student asked:

How does it feel to have so much of one's identity defined by one's family/group and the land you are on?

Implicit in the question was a strong reaction—shared by most of the other students—to the perceived limitations implicit in those ways of identifying oneself: 1. a limitation on the very mobility that the students felt they must have in order to maximize their earning power and/or self-realization; 2. the ability to create and re-create oneself and one's sense of identity, apart from one's family and/or ethnic group, if, indeed, there is the perception that one belongs to an ethnic group—a perception most of the white students do not have.

These objections are strong in my students and, I must admit, in me. However, I think Tinker and other indigenous people are on to something in their insistence that there must be a connection between one's notion of justice and one's relationship to the land and the people with whom one shares it.

Finding a Way to Here

To introduce the more constructive part of this essay, I offer another story.

One day as I was working in my yard, a neighbor came by and asked if I would be willing to help a local neighborhood association in a fight over a landfill expansion they were involved in. Since they had helped our neighborhood with an issue the year before, she asked if I would go to a meeting and consider contacting a city councilor I knew.

That evening I went to the meeting; what I heard was dumbfounding: 1. The City-County Utilities Commission was planning to triple the size of the city landfill in the midst of 15,000 residents within 2 ½ miles of it. That is a population ten times

more dense than that around any other landfill in the state; 2. It was, essentially, a regional landfill with trash coming from three other surrounding counties; 3. The 180 acres for the expansion had been bought in secret by the Utilities Commission, threatening the owners if they revealed the plans to their neighbors; 4. The property values of the surrounding neighborhoods, some as close as 800 feet, would drop as much as \$30,000 to \$100,000; 5. There had been, in the last year, as many as 6 fires at the old site, requiring calls to the fire department; 6. A report of groundwater contamination under the existing landfill had been filed with the state regulatory agency.

As we began to mobilize to raise awareness of all of this, we decided to do more research to understand why the city council would approve of these sorts of effects on its constituents inside the city limits. Surrounding counties had long since located their landfills in rural areas away from urban populations. What we discovered was, in some ways, even more sobering: 1. The city had given over its control over the water and sewer works—the most important asset it controls, in terms of growth and vitality, to the joint Utilities Commission (UC) in 1976; 2. The rules were drawn up in such a way that all of the proceeds of the sale of water would go to the expansion of infrastructure, directing new development outside the city in the suburbs; 3. The net effect over the last thirty years is a distinct pattern of white flight with predominately white affluent suburban communities that have, because of the availability of water and sewer services, incorporated and, therefore, by state statute can fend off city attempts at annexation; 4. While the tax base of the city had shrunk as a result of this development pattern driving up tax rates for city residents, residents of suburban communities paid a fraction in municipal taxes ; 5. The shift in residential patterns has meant that most of the new schools have been built in the suburbs with the effect of re-segregating our district with predominately African-American schools in the city and predominately white schools in the suburbs; 6. The creation of the UC took place four years after school de-segregation in Forsyth County—a development we do not think is accidental—a white person can live in the suburbs, work in Winston-Salem, pay less in taxes, and enjoy newer and better schools, with a very small percentage of African-American and Hispanic students; 7. The UC members are almost without exception builders, developers and bankers and attorneys linked to the development community; 8. Some of these members are instrumental in not only funding city council campaigns, but also choosing who will run for election. In all of this I and my neighbors learned a lot about the form of classism and racism in our community.

In terms of class, developers can buy undeveloped, rural land at low prices, build subdivisions, contract with UC to run water and sewer to them, and, then, sell high. There is a lot of money to be made; too bad that it is made on the backs of middle-class homeowners who have a significant portion of their retirement money invested in the home equity.

In terms of race, I have already mentioned the racial re-segregation of the schools and the differential in resources available to them. In addition, it is also not an accident that the landfill exists in one of the wards with the highest percentage of African-Americans and which is one of the politically weakest in the city. I learned that this pattern is common and is called “environmental racism.”

Armed with this knowledge and some pretty compelling arguments the neighborhood association tried to avoid the NIMBY (Not in My Neighborhood) label by cultivating support for our cause in other parts of the city. We sought help from other middle-class neighborhood groups, through the Winston-Salem Neighborhood Alliance, and with the Ministers' Conference of Winston-Salem and Vicinity—a predominately African-American organization that came to embrace our cause, as another effort to combat racism in our community.

As we did that, particularly, with the ministers, we learned about other issues affecting African-Americans that had been invisible to our predominately white group. Racism was no longer abstract; it wasn't something that affected people we didn't know. It was about the friend of one of our group, Harold, who was wrongly accused of a string of jewelry store robberies he had nothing to do with. It was about Darryl serving 19 years for a rape and murder he knew nothing about. It was about J.T. who—though very gifted—was routinely suspended from school and had trouble keeping up academically. Our need for and development of allies, led some of us into relationships that helped us see dynamics that had been invisible to us before.

In the midst of the landfill struggle, our neighborhood group helped start an interfaith organization, affiliated with the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF)—started by Saul Alinsky back in the 1930s—now made up by 53 dues-paying congregations—including a mosque, a synagogue, churches, and four neighborhood organizations. In the last several years, that organization, CHANGE (Communities Helping All Neighbors Gain Empowerment) has: audited all 66 schools in the district and secured a commitment from the Superintendent to establish baseline equity standards; obtained \$132,000 from the City Council for summer youth jobs; won \$800,000 to keep open a downtown health clinic, used by many poor, working poor, and moderate income folks; increased voter turnout by an average of 8-13 percent in 33 precincts by contacting more than 10,000 citizens in the 2004 elections; successfully lobbied to change school board elections from partisan to non-partisan, mitigating some of the control over education exercised by suburbanites. Currently, we are working on a \$25-50 million Community/Human Development Fund for affordable housing, blight removal, local health clinics, and grocery stores in predominately African-American and Hispanic neighborhoods, and senior services.

The landfill struggle ended fairly well. CHANGE included the area around the landfill in its audit of city neighborhoods and held an assembly, attended by two hundred fifty delegates from member organizations, asking the mayor to address that issue, as well as others. Due, in large part, to that leverage, the city agreed to buy out about thirty of the closest homeowners, build bigger buffers, and use only 90 of the 240 acres originally planned for the expansion. Several lessons emerged from involvement in this struggle against racist and classist exploitation.

First, in order to make much headway against institutional racism, sexism, and heterosexism, you need power. In public work, there are two predominant kinds of power—organized money and organized people. Many of us who would like to see our institutions and our world transformed and the effects of these crippling forms of oppression lessened generally do not have a lot of the first kind of power. But we do make decisions everyday about where our energy, time and talent are going to be invested. Organizing and collaborating with other people, particularly those separated from us by race, ethnicity, class, and sexual orientation—to name

just a few of these dividers—requires that we make conscious decisions to do so. Those decisions bring with them costs, in terms of time, energy, money, and—in some cases public reputation.

Second, in order to organize people you need relationships with them. The IAF defines power as two or more people agreeing to do something and then doing it (Chambers, 2003, pp. 27ff.). In order to induce someone to agree to a joint plan of action, you need to obtain their consent. While you can for a time, force, intimidate, shame, or guilt to consent to a plan, those strategies are not the basis for the long-term consent and widespread consent necessary for the kind of power necessary to transform our institutions, communities and the world. The best way to win consent from someone is to develop a plan that includes their self-interest. In order to know what another person's self-interest is, you have to ask them and then observe whether what they do is consistent with what they say. In other words, you have to develop a relationship with them (Chambers, 2003, pp. 44ff.).

Third, one's power—in public work—depends not so much on one's merit, academic credentials, or powers of persuasion, but more on the number and quality of the relationships one has. For example, as one of the spokespersons for our neighborhood association in the landfill fight, I came to see that the city councilors were generally not moved as much by what we said, but on what we would say—after we left the room—to people whose support they needed. Relationships of trust with people that those in power need constitute an important source of power.

Fourth, critical men's studies scholarship has shown that developing mutually respectful relationships with people is not something many men have been socialized, conditioned, or taught to do effectively. It requires the vulnerability of listening to the heart of another and the risk of being changed by what you hear. It requires the vulnerability of sharing one's own desires, passions, and visions. Ironically, then, learning to be appropriately vulnerable is a path to the kind of social power required to address effectively institutional expressions of, for example, racism and classism.

In conclusion, I want to note the connections among several themes touched on in this essay. As I began to pay more attention to where I was—that is, to the particular neighborhood, city and region where I live—I became aware of policies, decisions and practices that threatened my wellbeing and that of those around me. It became clear that my wellbeing was integrally tied to that of my neighbors and our wellbeing depended on the willingness of others in the city to work with us. The effectiveness of our collaboration, in turn, depended on our willingness to create new spaces to meet with, talk, and listen to one another. Those new, cultural spaces and the processes in which I participated began to change both my sense of myself and my assessment of what was possible. When our neighborhood association began the fight, we were told, "You can't fight city hall." We joined hands with the Winston-Salem Neighborhood Alliance and its 26 member organizations, as well as with CHANGE and its 53 congregations and neighborhood groups. City Hall was willing, then, to listen and negotiate a more mutually beneficial plan for the landfill. We learned that, in the pursuit of fairness, the fact that we belonged to a group—a neighborhood association or a congregation—mattered much more than who we were individually.

I return now to the two practices—a focus on time and an individualist identity—and the six hypotheses about “the souls of white folks.” As I became more aware of where I was, geographically, I became concerned about dynamics and conditions that adversely affected our neighborhood and larger community that were invisible to me before. My understanding of my self-interest also broadened. The threat to the property values of my neighbors did not significantly affect me, but other things did—the potential threat to the water table under the landfill, the higher municipal taxes, and the re-segregation of the schools as a result of the policies of the Utilities Commission. I saw more clearly that my self-interest was integrally connected to that of others around me. It also became abundantly clear that—for all my education and academic work—I was not going to be able to do very much about the unjust effects of the landfill expansion, without the collaboration of others. Developing that collaboration involved many hours of conversation—listening to the self-interest of others and sharing aspects of my own. In the process, my sense of identity shifted a bit. I belonged to a neighborhood and group of neighbors what were linked to other neighborhoods in particular ways.

The concern about the dynamics negatively affecting our neighborhood and shift in my self-understanding elicited an urgency to address them. That urgency lessened, somewhat, the temporal urgency I felt to maintain the schedule of the traditional professional productivity, to which I had become accustomed. That concern and shift has also altered the academic, professional scope of my work. Depending on the mission of one’s institution, academic productivity tends to be focused fairly narrowly on a very small number of specialists with whom one carries on technical conversations at conferences and in print. Currently, I am attempting to bring to my professional work some of the fruit of this new spatial awareness and sense of identity. As mentioned before, I now teach a course on Native American culture and perspectives and have developed an annual faculty, staff and student service trip to San Carlos. I have also created a service-learning course, “Religion and Public Life” that requires volunteering in a not-for-profit or other agency and introduces students to notions of relational power, social capital, and faith perspectives that encourage public work for justice.

It now seems imperative to encourage students—and myself—to be where they are, to notice who is there and how they are related to them, and to learn how to address what obstructs their flourishing and those—animate and inanimate—around them.

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Notes

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² Retrieved from <http://www.indiancountry.com/content.cfm?id=1086285769> and <http://www.swirc.org/livingconditions.cfm?ep=4>

³ Chapters 1-4 for his description of three paradigms of theology that recur across historical eras and cultural differences throughout the history of Christianity. His Type A roughly corresponds to the contemporary conservative position, while Type B corresponds to the liberal position.

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