Chapter 11

An Invitation to Civic Dialogue

11.1 Introduction

We could move toward a climate of justice. If I'm right, we know what to do. We have to learn more and more about the American people—all the people. We have to recognize our shared Earth and humanity, our social differences and the capacity for creating community. As citizens, we have to protect vulnerable civilians and the vulnerable Earth. We have to work at establishing justice as reciprocity, which will result, among other things, in the sharing of a city's wealth with all members. To do that, we must repair social relationships, caused by violations of humanity and become involved in the creation of civic community. Civilians, almost by definition, would be open to such an endeavor, if they could trust others to understand them as equals. It's more difficult for citizens, like myself, who live in a social world that encourages us to focus on our own lives instead of the different social worlds in which we live. At the same time, the tailwinds of American Prosperity are carrying us toward an unsustainable future. It's hard not to recognize we are in a turbulent time with the social and environmental challenges growing every day. To put it in a nutshell:

It's a turbulent time
Our stories are clashing
The Oceans are rising and
Civilians are uniting.

Today, the clash of stories abounds. When you open your eyes, you cannot avoid it. Walk around the National Mall. Walk by Washington Monument, and the Jefferson, Lincoln, and Roosevelt memorials, then the memorials to the two World Wars, and the Korean and Vietnam Wars, and then the Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial, the National Museum of the American Indian and the Museum of African American History and Culture. All these memorials have their stories, told

by louder and louder story tellers. Outside the National Mall, controversies abound about our monuments. Some have interpreted these controversies as “cultural wars,” but I think a deeper appreciation will recognize the controversy as opening a door to receive invitations from others that offer the possibility of healing the wounds of the past.

11.2 The Clash of Stories

The call to remove Confederate Memorials, the names of enslavers and those who profited from slavery dominated most of 2020, and the controversy of their “place” in our understanding of ourselves continues. What we can agree on, or so it seems, is that the different memorials offer us opportunities to engage in critical conversations. As strange as it may seem, these clashes offer opportunities for creating an inclusive and just future, not because they will lead to the right policies, but because they may lead us to consider our social climate: a climate of injustice that has its origin in the Atlantic trade of people and land and that has never been fully repaired. Perhaps no clash is as challenging and therefore as potentially rewarding as the clash between the Stone Mountain relief of Confederate figures in Georgia and the new lynching memorial in Montgomery, Alabama: The National Memorial for Peace and Justice.

11.2.1 *Confederate and Lynching Memorials*

Stone Mountain is a large granite dome, which was the site of the second founding of the Ku Klux Klan in 1915. The owners of the mountain, the Venable family, deeded its north side to the United Daughters of the Confederacy in 1916 to create a Civil War monument. They hired sculptor, Gutzon Borglum, to design and carve the monument, but he left the work unfinished in 1925. A second sculptor, Augustus Lukeman, took his place and designed the relief with three Confederate figures—Jefferson Davis, Robert E. Lee, and Stonewall Jackson, but In 1928 the Venable family reclaimed their property leaving the monument unfinished. Almost 40 years later, the Project resumed largely in response to the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision to end school segregation and the growing Civic Rights Movement. The Georgia Governor, Marvin Griffin, stated in his 1955 inaugural address: “So long as Marvin Griffin is your governor, there will be no mixing of the races in the classroom of our schools and colleges of Georgia.” (Boissonneault 2017). The State of Georgia then took control of the project and resumed its development in 1964. It was formally completed in 1972. Today, Stone Mountain Park is the hottest tourist spot in the state of Georgia (Fig. 11.1).

In the neighboring state of Alabama, sits the Memorial for Peace and Justice. A project of the Equal Justice Initiative in Montgomery, Alabama. On its website, its statement of purpose reads:

Fig. 11.1 Stone Mountain, Georgia (Pixabay License by Paul Brennan, Winder, United States)

Fig. 11.2 National Memorial for Peace and Justice (original to the author)

The Equal Justice Initiative is committed to ending mass incarceration and excessive punishment in the United States, to challenging racial and economic injustice, and to protecting basic human rights for the most vulnerable people in American society (The National Memorial for Peace and Justice).

They began work on this memorial to lynching in 2010 and it opened to the public in 2018. In their research for the memorial, they documented over 4400 lynchings. The memorial structure symbolizes these events with over 88 steel columns hanging from the ceiling at different heights, one for each county where a lynching occurred. The names of the lynching victims are engraved on the columns (Fig. 11.2).

The stories that give meaning to these monuments could not be more opposite: one created during the Jim Crow era honoring the Confederate heroes, the other acknowledging the victims of the Jim Crow era who suffered the terror of the Klan and white mobs. Given the chasm between these two stories, how can we create a world in which we can talk with each other? This would not be the world of “either/or” nor the world of “both/and” but a new world, held together by the bond of reparation and reciprocity. How could such a world come into being? Before I try to answer these questions, I want to share another clash of memorials that tell different stories about our relationship with the earth: the clash between Mount Rushmore and the Crazy Horse Memorial.

11.2.2 Mount Rushmore and the Crazy Horse Memorial

Mount Rushmore gets its name from Charles Edward Rushmore, a lawyer in Philadelphia who befriended miners in the Black Hills. The idea of Mount Rushmore belongs to Doane Robinson, a state historian of South Dakota. He wanted South Dakota to have something like Georgia’s Stone Mountain—the impressive rock carving of three Confederate figures. Robinson enlisted Gutzon Borglum who had previously worked on Stone Mountain and after some negotiations selected the Rushmore peak for the site. Borglum began carving the images of four Presidents—Washington, Jefferson, Lincoln, and Teddy Roosevelt—in 1927. The work was finished in 1941. Borglum gave the following reason for his work:

The purpose of the memorial is to communicate the founding, expansion, preservation, and unification of the United States with colossal statues of Washington, Jefferson, Lincoln, and Theodore Roosevelt (National Park Service, Mount Rushmore).

The purpose of the memorial, in other words, was not just the honoring of four Presidents, but also the celebration of the unity of the whole country. President Calvin Coolidge’s Dedication Speech on August 10, 1927 includes the following about the memorial’s location in the Black Hills:

Its location will be significant. Here in the heart of the continent, on the side of a mountain which probably no white man had ever beheld in the days of Washington, in territory which was acquired by the action of Jefferson, which remained an unbroken wilderness beyond the days of Lincoln, which was especially beloved by Roosevelt, the people of the future will see history and art combined to portray the spirit of patriotism (1927),

Coolidge probably did not have any inkling that “the people of the future” would not only visit Mount Rushmore, but also, less than 10 miles away, the Crazy Horse Memorial. Henry Standing Bear, a Lakota chief, wanted an Indian leader to be added to the four Presidents at Mount Rushmore. When his request was denied, he and other Lakota leaders began planning their own memorial (Figs. 11.3 and 11.4).

In 1938, Chief Henry Standing Bear contacted the Polish-American sculptor Korczak Ziolkowski. Ziolkowski had worked on the Rushmore monument with

Fig. 11.3 Mt. Rushmore (Pixabay License by Guy Johnson, Ottumwa, United States)

Fig. 11.4 Crazy Horse Memorial (Pixabay License by Michael, United States)

Borglum but left before it was finished. After some delay and service in the army during World War II, Ziolkowski with his wife and family began carving the mountain in 1947. Currently, the monument is the largest in the world: 841 feet long and 563 feet high. I found it very impressive when we visited it in the summer of 2018. Ziolkowski and his family's dedication to this work was also impressive. His family still continues to work on the monument, which will take decades to finish. Maybe I shouldn't be so impressed, but here is a white guy ensuring that we have a chance to know the greatness of the American Crazy Horse, and through him, the life of First Americans. When I visited the Monument, I read this piece of wisdom that Ziolkowski left for us.

"When the legends die, the dreams end;
When the dreams end, there is no more greatness.
Don't forget your dreams."

So, which dreams should we not forget? There is the dream represented by Mount Rushmore. The dream of Western expansion that shuts out the nightmare of the genocide of Native Americans and the dreams of dominating the Earth for American Prosperity. If you just visited the Rushmore Monument and read its publicity, you would never know that the mountain as well as the Black Hills were sacred sites to the Lakota people. The dream of Crazy Horse is that of a warrior who fought to protect his family and their place on the Earth. He was not a civilian. But he did fight to protect civilians. The Presidents atop Mount Rushmore were civilian Presidents. They were there, however, because the military had cleared the land for white settlers through military expansion. Today we live with multiple stories of the land "from sea to shining sea."

If we want to engage in a civic conversation, where should we meet? At Stone Mountain? At the Peace and Justice Memorial? Who will invite whom? Who will come? If the invitation comes from Stone Mountain, will only white people come? Why would anyone else come to a memorial to the "Southern Regime"? No, the invitation needs to come from a memorial that is not shrouded in a climate of injustice but rather one that opens the path to creating a climate of justice such as the Peace and Justice Memorial in Montgomery.

Some might want to meet in the middle. Is there a middle between enslavement and freedom, justice and injustice? Is there a middle between vulnerable civilians and secure citizens? Let's not forget that these stories of clashes are not clashes between peoples on the same playing field. The clashes were between master and slave, between American expansion and Native American genocide. Their legacy is a legacy of oppressor and oppressed, exploiter and exploited, the privileges of living in a white world and the stigma of being a Person of Color. Remember that Mount Rushmore exists in the Black Hills, a sacred place for the Lakota people. What happens when you stand on this sacred ground and think about the relationship between these two monuments? Do you feel welcome here? Do you think you need an invitation? When I was a college student, I received an invitation that changed my life; not from the Black Hills, but from Montgomery, Alabama.

11.3 My Invitation

In the Spring of 1965, I joined a small group of college students in Nebraska who had told the organizers of the civil rights march from Selma and Montgomery that we would come if we were needed. After the marchers were turned back with brutal force at the Edmund Petrus Bridge in Selma, the organizer of our group received a call that invited us to come to Montgomery during the week of the second march. Their idea was to have some white kids in the black community to make it less likely that white supremacists would harm them. We drove to Montgomery in a VW bus and spent a week passing out flyers during the day about that night's rally and in the evening attending the rallies. When the marchers from Selma arrived on the edge of Montgomery, they held a mass meeting that we joined and the next day marched with them into the city. We listened to the leaders of the civil rights movement, including Martin Luther King, Jr. It was the first time I heard him speak. I also heard Dr. King in 1966 in a Chicago church when I was working during the summer for the Chicago Missionary Society, and in 1967 when he gave his famous speech about the Vietnam War at Riverside Church in New York City. I have never heard another voice that resonated with the truth as King's. When I look back, I had this opportunity not because of what I had done, but because I had been invited.

This invitation could be seen as an invitation to join a civilian movement, if we see the marchers as vulnerable and depending on the rule of law for protection. I was certainly not invited to become a member of the black community. Nor was I expected to be someone I was not—to become “not-white.” At the same time, by accepting the invitation, I had acknowledged the wrongs of white supremacy; wrongs that others suffered that I had not because I was a white male. I could denounce white supremacy and critically expose white arrogance, as I have done in this book, but I could not deny that I had benefited from my white skin and ancestry. Perhaps my invitation was an invitation to become a caring citizen—an identity worth considering.

11.4 A Caring Citizen

If we stay with our definition of civilians as vulnerable people who rely on the enforcement of the rule of law, one may wonder if someone who has access to the privileges of the white man's world can honestly connect with civilians. They may have empathy, but is that enough? Empathy may help us understand someone else, but it does little to help us understand our relationship with someone else, especially from that person's perspective. I could also imagine that we are all humans, which is true from some perspective, but if that perspective erases our social differences, then I have further isolated my self from the other rather than become closer. First and foremost, one needs to care about the relationship. Motivation, of course, is not enough. I was motivated to join the Selma to Montgomery march, but I also needed

to be invited; I could not invite myself. We can only invite others to our social worlds. You need an invitation to join someone else's.

Privileged citizens can ask to be invited, but they may not receive an invitation because civilians may not believe that they have separated themselves enough from the normal perceptions and patterns of the white male world to enter another's social world. Moving between different social worlds requires some social agility. Let's use Antonio Damasio's notion of the self as the conductor created by the orchestra to illustrate the requirement here (2010, p. 22). If all the people in your orchestra that constitute your self are just like you, then it will be hard to enter another's social world. If your orchestra includes people from different social worlds, it will be much easier. We can even ask each other; "Whom have you included or excluded in your understanding of yourself? People like me who are white males do not need to have a completely white orchestra. We can choose one that is more inclusive and richer in sound, which changes our consciousness of being a person.

What about this question: "What would a white male caring citizen look like?" From my experiences, I would describe such a person as one who tries to be watchful of biases, continually critical of white arrogance, and works with others in the creation of a climate of justice. In small ways, I have done this type of work in the classroom as well as in ethics programs in corporations and in my writing. This does not mean, however, that I have transcended my social identity or the internalization of white biases. Robin DiAngelo, who conducts workshops on white racism, is probably right when she writes that the best white people can do is to be "less white" (2018, p. 149). I am not sure about "less white," but we can be more human. By that I mean we can become more aware of the differences between our social and natural or biological selves.

As living human beings, we all have dignity and deserve respect. At the same time, we all exist in very different social worlds that have greatly benefited some and greatly harmed others. That's true, but we make a mistake when we see our particular social identity as all that we are. The interpretive framework that we are using here includes four basic elements: the Earth, our humanity, the social, and the civic. We are all participants in the Earth's processes. We belong to the Earth. We are also humans who are designed to live purposeful and relational lives. We do this in social worlds and social relationships that have violated some people's human dignity and have broken relationships among most of us. The civic is the place where we have a chance to repair these relationships when we respect our shared human dignity and care about our social relationships. No one is ever nothing but his or her social self. Maybe a little education for white people will prevent us from making such a mistake.

11.5 Education for White People

To engage in the work of creating a climate of justice based on the repair of social relations and mutual recognition, we need to overcome a major obstacle: white supremacy and arrogance. It would be a mistake to put all white persons in the

Fig. 11.5 Education for White People

Education for White People

1. Distinguish between personal and social stories
2. Explore the sources of white arrogance
3. Talk about how you have benefited from racism
4. Listen to how others see you
5. Compose stories that include all Americans
6. Participate in the creation of a climate of justice

same box, but we need to acknowledge that the box (a white privileged social world) exists. White persons may not be able to get out of the box, but they can become aware of it. Such awareness includes not only a critical analysis of the white social world's patterns and on-going conversations, but also critical reflection of how this social world has shaped one's beliefs. Learning about this white social world as a white person is an educational process that includes the following steps (Fig. 11.5).

Because of the strong individualism of American prosperity that assumes that we do not have a social identity, it's easy for persons to take any criticism of the racism in their social world as a criticism of them. The truth is that while we live in a social world, we live in it as persons, with a personal story. True, our social world gives us our perceptions and expectations, however, we can distance ourselves from those that diminish the dignity of others. Making a distinction between our personal and social stories gives us space to examine the social amnesia of the social world of white arrogance and to reject its racialized humanity. We can certainly acknowledge how we have benefited from being white in the white social world, but we can also tell coherent stories that tell how others have paid the price for our benefits when that is the case. Furthermore, when we are honest, these social advantages do not protect us from the human vulnerabilities that we all face.

Instead of acknowledging vulnerabilities, many white men, and other men as well, see vulnerabilities as a challenge to overcome. The truth is that vulnerability is a human condition not a human problem. My guess is that most of us have in our circles of friends vulnerable people—people who struggle with illnesses, lose, addiction and death. We may split them off from our lives and avoid responding to their invitations for conversations, but that prevents us not only from understanding their social worlds, but also our own. Once others are included in our lives, we gain a better understanding of ourselves. With this broader social understanding, we can listen and tell stories that reveal relationships that need repair and restoration. We can then participate with civilians in the creation of a climate of justice. This process begins with an invitation from civilians. Since we are more closely related to some civilians than to others, there are different types of invitations, and therefore different appropriate responses.

11.6 Types of Civilian Invitations

The International Red Cross Committee's 1949 Geneva Protocol on the protection of civilians did not distinguish between civilians who are far away or close at hand, but distance does seem to make a difference. One way to take these differences into account is to think of civilian connections on a continuum from personal face-to-face relations to imaginary relations with civilians of future generations. Michael Boylan provides a model for making these distinction in his book *Morality and Global Justice* (1975). He distinguishes between personal, shared and extended relationships. For our purposes, let's say that the personal refer to face-to-face relations. Shared relationships refer to situations where we as citizens share the same national boundaries as the civilians. Extended relations, on the other hand, would refer to civilians who exist outside our national responsibilities, but may or may not be influenced by US foreign actions. Since future generations fit the definition of civilians—vulnerable and rely on the protection of the rule of law—I propose four types of connections: personal, shared, extended, and imaginary. We can think of these as different types of invitations, if we understand an invitation simply as a request that asks for a response, and different invitations will elicit different challenges.

11.6.1 *Invitations from Future Generations*

How would you imagine an invitation from future generations? What would it mean to identify them as civilians? I imagine the invitation would ask us to protect them, and to give them a chance for a viable future, which means that we also protect the Earth. They would ask us not to use more than our fair share, and to make sure they get their share. Perhaps their most challenging request would be to pass on to them a climate of justice rather than a climate of injustice. This would mean that we would have to tell each other the truth and repair broken and injured relationships.

How would future generations know whether or not we have accepted their invitation? They could tell by what things get our attention, what stories we tell, and how we listen to each other. If we are focused on the stock market, shopping, and entertainment, then their despair may almost be palpable. If we tolerate injustices in silence, they may wonder if and when we will listen to those who are speaking up. Our responses to contemporary civilians may represent better than anything else our connection to future generations. "The tailwinds are strong; they carry our wrongs." Unless we change the social climate behind these tailwinds, future generations will not inherit the life we would wish for them. We can change these tailwinds by paying attention to the other types of civilian invitations: the extended, shared, and personal. As an example of an extended civilian invitation, we can imagine an invitation from a Syrian civilian.

11.6.2 Invitation from Syrian Civilians

The civilians of Syria have endured war more or less since the Arab Spring in 2011, and millions now live in refugee camps.. What kind of invitation could you imagine from them? What kind of response fits with your picture? One may feel empathy. Certainly. Empathy may help us feel what they feel but not what they feel about us or what we would feel if we looked at ourselves from their eyes. What does American prosperity and our military establishment have to do with Syria?

This question raises other questions, such as: How dependent is our economy on weapon sales in the Middle East, not only in regard to sales and therefore domestic jobs, but also in terms of the stock market's growth? Why have we not created an arms embargo to prevent millions of weapons from entering Syria? The United Nations now spends much of its peace-keeping work protecting civilians. Why have we not given the UN sufficient support in its mission?

The truth is that we have not developed a foreign policy that gives a high priority to the protection of civilians. As John Tirman shows in his book, *The Death of Others*, the killing of civilians has often been part and parcel of American war strategy (2011). The US is not alone in this strategy. The point here, however, is that the silence about these casualties prevents us from moving from a climate of injustice to a climate of justice. Our response to the Syrian invitation, therefore, is at least two-fold. We should think about the interventions of international agencies, such as the Red Cross that are addressing the "humanitarian crisis." What can they do to the social climate of the refugee camps? How does their work affect the social climate of the Middle East? We should also examine our military role in the Middle East and evaluate whether it is guided by the protection of American prosperity or the protection of civilians.

When we move from extended connections with civilians beyond our national boundaries to shared connections at our national boundaries, the invitation becomes even more an invitation to understand ourselves as well as an invitation to understand others. This is especially true with civilians at our Southern border.

11.6.3 Invitation from Migrants at the Southern Border

Migrants from violence and terror in South American countries have come north to find a safe home. One could say they are seeking a climate of justice, where their cases would receive a generous hearing and fair disposition. They appear to be escaping a climate of injustice where gangs commit violence with impunity, but are they finding a climate of justice here?

Do we really want to understand our connection with these "American" migrants? Our common history reveals that there is much that we share. Until 1849, most of the southwest, from California to Colorado was part of Mexico. While the national boundary may separate us, much more unites us. Why not propose that just like

European countries formed a European Union, American countries should form an American Union? Instead of a wall, what about another bridge? If we recognized the plea of these migrants to ensure that they are given the protection that civilians deserve, we would not only have a clearer understanding of them, but also of ourselves.

Invitations from shared connections—even more directly than extended invitations—ask us not only to acknowledge the situation of others but also the relationship between their plight and our well-being. This involves both empathy and self-understanding. There is no shortage of such invitations. One thinks of the invitation by the Lakota tribe to join them at Standing Rock to protect their territory and water supply. Or the communities throughout the nation who have lost their homes due to fires, floods, and hurricanes. Or the black communities unable to acquire good housing, life provisions, education, or even safe neighborhoods.

For those of us who live in the last days of American prosperity, there are many such groups that are calling for our attention, and in most cases, the invitation is not only to acknowledge their civil rights but also our role in their plight. Engaging in this work of justice could take various forms, but perhaps the most effective is one similar to the strategies to stop the killing of Vietnam civilians years ago—education, protest, and other forms of political action. Although our responses to an invitation from a shared connection can be quite personal, sometimes we also receive face-to-face personal invitations. In these invitations, we can engage in a personal dialogical process, or at least we have the possibility.

11.6.4 Personal Invitation to Engage in Dialogue

An invitation from another person to a dialogue does something for me that I cannot do for myself: it transforms me into a “you.” Personal invitations use second person pronouns. “How are you?” “How do you feel?” “What do you think?” Instead of reporting on “me,” I am asked to become someone in the face of the person who has extended the invitation. My answer could be just a report about “me,” of course, which would be a case of not hearing the invitation. The invitation not only invites me to step up as a “you,” but also to respond to the other by inviting them to become a “you” as well. When the relationship becomes a you-you relationship, the participants can enter into a creative dialogue.

Each dialogue has a life of its own, of course, and yet there are several elements that are fairly well known. The following list of six elements are a result of years of collaborating with others in teaching the dynamics of dialogue (Fig. 11.6).

Not every civic conversation will include all of these aspects of dialogue at least not explicitly. The process must be open-ended and grounded in mutual respect. In terms of a civilian dialogue, one must take care of the differences and conflicts arising from people coming to the dialogue with very different experiences and assumptions. What would such a dialogue look like? It would have some of the characteristics listed above, and it would probably have a flow of questions and

Six Elements of Dialogue

1. Recognize Others	Listen to what you have not heard before
2. Ask Questions of Inquiry	Ask questions where you don't know the answer.
3. Listen to know more	Honor what others know that you do not.
4. Explore the Unknown	Explore what the dialogue brings to mind.
5. Develop thought	Respond to that is thought-provoking
6. Gain self-understanding	Synthesize different voices

Fig. 11.6 Six Elements of Dialogue (original to the author)

answers. The following dialogue illustrates this process as well as presents some of the issues that need to be addressed in conversations between privileged white and unprivileged black persons.

- W. I would like to share my ideas about how we should live together.
 B. You want to talk to me about how we should live together?
 W. Yes.
 B. Did I invite you?
 W. Well, no. I do assume we have similar interests. Right?
 B. No, not really, do you know anything about my interests?
 W. What do you mean?
 B. Do you know enough about me to know what interests me?
 W. Probably not, but I could learn about you if we engage in a conversation
 B. Do you really want to learn about me?
 W. Of course, at least as much as you want to know about me.
 B. I already know enough about you.
 W. How can you say that? We have not started sharing.
 B. I know that you think you can engage in a conversation with me whenever you want to.
 W. I guess so. What is wrong with that?
 B. It indicates that you don't really understand our social differences/ Did you notice that I am a different gender and skin color? We really do live in different social worlds. I would never approach you as you have approached me.
 W. Why not?
 B. Because you remain unaware of things that are different for us, so I cannot really trust you.
 W. My goodness, I didn't know that. I assumed that I could express my ideas and then you would respond with your ideas, and we could then continue an interesting exchange of ideas.
 B. Sorry, I know I will lose if we engage in such an exchange of ideas. You are really good at dealing with ideas.
 W. You make that sound like a liability.
 B. It's only a liability when it diverts us from paying attention to what is preventing us from developing a relationship.
 W. I thought we are relating.
 B. Well, we are talking, but so far, we have been sending messages to each other, not really engaging in the creation of a dialogues that unites us—a dialogues that allows us to really see and feel each other's presence.

- W. What needs to happen for us to move into that kind of dialogue?
- B. I need to invite you.
- W. What?
- B. For me to invite you, I would have to see that there is more between us than our social differences.
- W. And what would that be?
- B. Let's call it our shared humanity.
- W. And what is preventing you from inviting me?
- B. As I said, it is a matter of trust.
- W. Listen. We really are in this together. We are both persons who at this moment are engaged in this conversation.
- B. We are not in this together. I live in a legacy of violations of our common humanity through racism, sexism, and imperialism, and you do not. In fact, your family has benefited from these inequalities.
- W. OK, I can admit that. Still, I didn't choose my parents any more than you did. I am not responsible for how things happen.
- B. I am not blaming you. Your privileges make my realities invisible to you. I am expressing the need to repair the violation of our common humanity.
- Without repair, we will never really be able to invite each other into a truly civic dialogue
- W. I find this really humiliating.
- B. And?
- W. I'm not guilty for what happened years ago. I wasn't even born, and my parents may be white, but they worked hard for what they got.
- B. Let me ask you something. What makes you feel humiliated?
- W. I feel so presumptuous.
- B. What does that mean?
- W. I assumed I could help improve things. I do have resources. But I didn't have any idea you would give me so much flack. It's just uncomfortable.
- B. And why do you feel that way now?
- W. It's the way you look at me.
- B. You mean the way you see yourself in my eyes?
- W. I don't know. I just feel vulnerable.
- B. I will not harm you.
- W. Will you help me understand myself?
- B. We have helped the likes of you for a long time.
- W. I am sorry.
- B. If you want to help, think about how to repair the violations of our shared humanity.
- W. So, what should we do?
- B. Can I ask you a question?
- W. Yes.
- B. When you were growing up, did your mother tell you that you were special?
- W. Of course!
- B. Well, you are not special. You're one of us. Just another person
- W. (long pause) That's a weird idea. I was just accepting the idea that we are different.
- B. We are different, and we are the same. To engage in a meaningful dialogue, we must be open to learning what this means. Can you do this?
- W. I can try.
- B. So, what do you say?
- W. We are in trouble.
- B. Yes, I know. The powers-that-be are endangering the life of our children and grandchildren. Your white male world is a world that refuses to acknowledge this.
- W. Why?

- B. Because you refuse to accept the limitations and vulnerabilities of human life. In your world, limitations are not barriers, but hurdles to jump over. Your world is built on a conspiracy not to tell the truth about how our worlds are related. You cannot see this until you join in exposing our real relationships, repairing them, and restoring our relationship with the Earth.

I could imagine that this dialogue, or some dialogue like this, needs to happen until there is a large and loud enough gathering of civilians to change our social climate to a climate of justice.. This will only happen, of course, if we are successful in creating the conditions for good conversations..

11.7 Creating Conditions for Good Conversations

One of the exercises in my book, *Learning Through Disagreement*, is designed for a self-evaluation of one's capacity for good conversations (2014, p. 15). Participants are asked to rank their experience with seven people they select on a scale of 1–5 in terms of the degree they can do the following: feel safe, ask questions, develop good reasons, trust each other's good intentions, value differences, and work together. As it turns out, most people give high marks to some of the seven participants and low to others. Most people sometimes have good conversations with some others but not everyone. I then asked them to imagine how those who had received low marks on their sheet would fill out the same chart with people they selected. "Would they also have people on their list of seven with high numbers and low numbers?" Most believed that would be the case. So, what does that mean? The quality of a conversation does not depend on each individual's capacity, but on the quality of the relationships in which the individuals participate. A good conversation, in other words, requires good relationships. Most of us can do this in the right conditions. So, what are the right conditions?

This work of creating the right conditions for good conversations has been a major theme throughout my career, beginning with my intern year in 1967 at the Evangelical Academies in Germany. The Academies were centers of dialogue for diverse groups from different organizations and institutions where members would come and explore their different views (1980). Instead of speaking only to those who already agreed with you, which is what I had experienced in the protests against the war in Vietnam, people with different views actually listened to one another. At the time, I saw this as a new mission for the church in the United States. Church leaders could facilitate conversations among diverse groups in various organizations, especially business organizations. The church I belonged to was not interested in this type of mission, so I continued this journey with others who were. After finishing my doctorate in the area of interpretive theory, I began teaching and have continued to teach organizational and business ethics focusing on this idea of creating the right conditions for good conversations.

From 1993 to 1997, I had the privilege of working as an external facilitator in the Ethics and Diversity Program at Levi Strauss and Company (1998). The program

offered employees two days of ethics training—learning how to use the company’s values in dealing with disagreement—and two days of diversity training—learning how to appreciate differences through dialogue and self-reflection. At the center of the program was the emphasis on dialogue—bracketing our judgments, mutual inquiry, careful listening, and questioning assumptions.

Creating the conditions for good conversations, as the sample dialogue tried to show, must be open to sharing perceptions and acknowledging one’s vulnerabilities. At the same time, differences need to be sorted out. Is the difference rooted in hierarchical racist assumptions supported by a climate of injustice, or a cultural/social difference that could promote a climate of justice? There are other questions. Is the personal relationship grounded in a shared humanity that allows mutual learning about the different social worlds in which the participants live? Is there an attempt to expose and re-balance the inequities of the social relations, or are they ignored? Is there an awareness of each other as a living being belonging to the Earth in need of a secure habitat? We may think we know the answers. Coming to the answers in a conversation with others who come from different social worlds could enable a change in the social climate from a climate of injustice to a climate of justice.

Think of a civic center not simply as a place, but also as a gathering of civilians and citizens who form a social climate that allows us to envision a viable future. In this context, one could imagine how all four strands of American prosperity—treating land as commodity, protecting a racialized humanity, maintaining social incoherence, and a militarized civic—are redirected toward Earth as a human habitat, a shared humanity, social coherence, and a civilian civic. Can we do this? We have to do something like it. Staying the course ruins the Earth for us. Changing course is the only real alternative. We do have the possibility of doing this, because:

We share a common humanity
Born in Africa
Inhabiting the Earth
Searching for a home.

We are all descendants of African people. Black is the original human color. Today we come in many colors as a result of inhabiting the Earth searching for a home. What we need, and have a right to, is a place for all of us. After all, we are the people.

11.8 We the People

The meaning of words depends on their context. When the framers of the Constitution wrote “We the People” they were living in a context or social climate of injustice. The “we” was limited to those privileged white males, who compromised themselves to make sure American Prosperity was not threatened. If we can change our social climate to a climate of justice, the meaning of “We the People” could also

change. The “people” would be ruled by the rule of law of their own making. Civilians could count on the rule of law, and on citizens making laws that protect human and non-human communities. This is possible to realize in civic conversations among civilians and citizens from different social worlds who consent to live on this planet in this time, and to make the repairs necessary to move toward a climate of justice together.

In this civic realm we can ask: “What should we do?” On the one hand, we do what is necessary to maintain the relationship created by seeing each other and thereby allowing each other to become a “you.” This is the realization of an awareness of our mutual dignity as human beings, and the recognition of the repairs of past injustices that must be made so we can trust each other to take care of our life together. This will mean, of course, making amends for past injustices. It will mean, of course, ensuring there is a secure home for us on the Earth. It will mean, of course, that we reverse the current trends toward inequality, authoritarianism, systemic racism, and planetary chaos and direct them toward a just and sustainable future.

So, how do we get there? We cannot do it with force. We do it through negotiation, trial and error, and the hard work of designing a sustainable prosperity for all of us. For this vision to take hold, we have to be empowered by the creation of a community based on our shared humanity, and a community unafraid of addressing past wrongs and repairing social relationships.

The existence of the monuments to Confederate heroes and the monuments to lynching cannot be denied. They and their contradictions stare us in the face. Same with Mt. Rushmore and the Crazy Horse Memorial in the Black Hills. Is the Earth ours to exploit or is it our living habitat? If “We” are “the people” then these contradictions must be held together by something besides the current climate of injustice in which they exist. If we can acknowledge the vulnerability and the pain behind these monuments, and begin the work of making reparations, a climate of justice could emerge that would not exclude our wounds but rather heal them. If we could do this, the recognition and repair of our unjust past would give us a foundation for designing a sustainable prosperity for all.

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