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# Habits of whiteness in the neighborhood: a critical race analysis of urban ministry paradigms

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Thesis

**HABITS OF WHITENESS IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD:**

**A CRITICAL RACE ANALYSIS OF URBAN MINISTRY PARADIGMS**

by

**DANIEL JAMES HAUGE**

B.A., Western Washington University, 1996
M.Div., Regent College, 2002

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Approved by

Reader  _____
Steven J. Sandage, Ph.D.
Albert and Jessie Danielsen Professor of Pastoral Psychology and
Theology

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**HABITS OF WHITENESS IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD:**

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ABSTRACT

Recent decades have seen an increased interest among predominantly white, middle-class evangelicals in church planting and organizing ministries in urban centers, often in racially diverse neighborhoods undergoing the process of gentrification. This thesis will analyze the phenomenon of white urban ministry through the lens of critical whiteness studies and psychoanalytic theory, drawing on Shannon Sullivan's notion of whiteness as unconscious habit characterized by ontological expansiveness. I propose that sincere efforts on the part of white urban ministry practitioners to form and nurture diverse communities rooted in place are impeded by habitual modes of relationship to place formed in predominantly white contexts, which reproduce, however unintentionally, patterns of white supremacy and displacement of people of color.

The thesis begins with a survey of print and online sources including accounts by white urban ministry practitioners and critiques of their models. I then address the theological and affective motives and rationales for these models, and examine their relationship to wider social patterns of gentrification. Next I will analyze these patterns in light of the work of critical theorists on whiteness, focusing on the nature of white

relationship to place shaped by centuries of colonialism. Developmental psychology will then be employed to account for white habit formation, drawing upon Kohut's account of the development of grandiosity. I conclude by calling for a paradigmatic shift toward de-centering whiteness, drawing upon theological and psychological resources to transform white relationship to place into one of respect and deference to diverse ways of being.

**Table of Contents**

## <u>Introduction</u>

Recent decades have seen two distinct but overlapping trends among progressive-leaning evangelical Protestants in the areas of mission and social concern: a focus on community and ministry in urban settings, and racial justice and reconciliation. Church plants and alternative forms of "missional community" have multiplied in central urban neighborhoods, and Christian blog sites and social media have given increasing attention to issues of racial diversity and white privilege. The conversations addressing these trends express signs of hope regarding the increased engagement with justice issues; but they also reveal increasing frustration with a lack of substantive structural change toward racial equality. Initiatives geared toward creating more just, diverse communities still appear to be predominantly designed, led, and attended by white people. Meanwhile, the relocation of more white Christians into racially diverse neighborhoods has in many ways expedited and legitimated the wider social reality of gentrification, in which long-term residents of neighborhoods—often lower income, often people of color—are displaced as wealthier, predominantly white people move in and gradually reshape living environments in line with their economic and aesthetic preferences. This results in a general pattern in which ministry initiatives intended to increase diversity and equality end up reinforcing patterns of white supremacy.

This thesis will analyze aspects of the "urban missional" movement within American evangelical Christianity, particularly the phenomenon of predominantly white Christians entering racially diverse, lower income urban neighborhoods for the purposes

of church planting or urban ministry. I argue that the behavioral and structural patterns of

such efforts manifest distinct habits of whiteness (understood as a matrix of attitudes and

behaviors embedded in the dominant social location of white people), specifically the

nature of the relationship between white individuals and geographic space. I will examine

the thought and practices of white urban ministry practitioners through the lens of critical

whiteness studies, as well as psychoanalytic theory, on the premise that social forces and

psychological habits influence and reinforce each other to maintain whiteness as a

dominant social position.

My underlying theoretical premise is that white ministry practices in racially

diverse and gentrifying neighborhoods—for all their variation in theological grounding,

aims, and techniques—share characteristics of what philosopher Shannon Sullivan calls

*ontological expansiveness*. "As ontologically expansive," Sullivan explains, "white

people tend to act and think as if all spaces—whether geographical, psychical, linguistic,

economic, spiritual, bodily, or otherwise—are or should be available for them to move in

and out of as they wish."[1] My selection and assessment of data, therefore, is not intended

to provide a multifaceted study of these movements but will use the concept of

ontological expansiveness as a heuristic device to determine how white urban ministry

practitioners think and talk (or do not) about issues of place as it relates to racial diversity

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[1] Shannon Sullivan, *Revealing Whiteness: The Unconscious Habits of Racial Privilege*
(Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2006), 10.

and justice, and the extent to which their practices may reflect unexamined white psychological habits of ontological expansiveness.

My research will begin with a survey of current urban missiological theory and practice, drawing from literature offering theological bases and strategies for urban church planting, mission, and intentional community. My sites of analysis include the work of Sean Benesh, a church planter in Portland, Oregon who has written and edited a compilation of articles specifically addressing church planting and gentrification. I will also examine Christian community development models exemplified by Robert Lupton's Focused Community Strategies, as well as the trend of neighborhood-based intentional community championed in Tim Soerens, Paul Sparks, and Dwight Friesen's book *The New Parish*. I will then draw from a sample of online literature and blogs reflecting on these practices, including critiques by ministers and social scientists focusing on their often detrimental effects upon communities of color.

These specific urban ministry practices will then be examined in the broader social context of gentrification, drawing from sociological analyses and journalistic accounts of this widespread phenomenon. I will then examine the theological and cultural rationales for urban ministry expressed by practitioners, tracing the theoretical roots of the movement to the Christian Community Development Association's emphasis on relocation and reconciliation, as well as recent theological interest in the nature of place. Benesh's emphasis on the value of "authenticity" in urban living will be examined and

interrogated in light of the historical and economic forces which produce gentrifying neighborhoods.

Using the lens of critical whiteness theory, I will then argue that aspects of these cultural movements reflect elements of the larger societal paradigm of white supremacy. Sullivan's account of psychological habit, George Yancy's analysis of whiteness as a social ontology, and Sara Ahmed's phenomenology of whiteness will be employed to demonstrate how instinctive patterns of white behavior originate in a social structure which advantages whites and oppresses people of color. The nature of white ontological expansiveness will be examined historically as an expression of colonialism through the analysis of Willie James Jennings, who finds in the colonial period an initial severing of identity from geography—a process which left whiteness as an identity grounded not in place but constituted in relation to non-white peoples defined as Other. I will argue that an ontologically expansive tendency characterizes most predominantly white urban ministry models, which move from an assumed centrality of white space into neighborhoods insufficiently perceived as already culturally and politically inhabited. Structural patterns of urban ministries then often reinforce a cultural and relational separateness from the wider neighborhood despite their physical location, neglecting the educational and relational development process required for developing truly reciprocal relationships in a diverse urban context. In this way white urban mission models embody an assumed ease entering into an urban social space which is often insufficiently sensitive to the culture and place-making efforts of original residents.

The psychological mechanisms by which this relationship to place is reinforced will be analyzed through the lens of psychoanalytic theory. Sullivan utilizes Laplanche's theory of infant development to account for how racialized assumptions and intuitions are inculcated during the formative years. I will also draw upon Heinz Kohut's notions of the grandiose self and cultural self-objects, which Phillis Sheppard develops into a comprehensive account of the role that the socio-cultural environment plays in early psychological development. Using this theory I will construct an account of the formation of white intuitions regarding place, positing that dominant cultural images and messages encourage a grandiose sense of easy mobility into new spaces right alongside a need for comfort and familiarity which requires certain levels of wealth and privilege to sustain.

I will conclude by advocating for theological models of ministry that encourage the *de-centering* of whiteness, which involves a thorough examination and critique of ministry structures in order to identify and disrupt patterns in which white agency, culture, or activity are the primary determinants of action. Jung Young Lee's account of marginality and James Cone's understanding of God's blackness will be used as examples of theological models centering the lived experience of people of color, which compel white Christians to face more directly the consequences of white supremacy on human lives. I emphasize that the very depth to which habits of whiteness are psychologically embedded means that a high degree of conscious effort is required to dismantle them, as well as a commitment to experiencing the discomfort and disorientation that comes from seeing one's own understanding of the world as contingent and harmful. Models for

urban ministry which ground themselves in a respect for place must be supplemented with a thorough understanding of racial power dynamics past and present, in order to open wider possibilities for mutually beneficial relationships between people of different social locations.

It is important for me to acknowledge that my interest in these issues is not abstract, but grows out of personal experience. In 2005 I moved to the diverse, gentrifying Columbia City neighborhood in southern Seattle, located in the larger geographic area known as the Rainier Valley. I helped found and lead an urban intentional community there, which while made up equally of Asian Americans and whites, reflected many of the cultural and theological assumptions about ministry I had learned in predominantly white contexts. Many of the concepts discussed in this thesis originated as ideas introduced to me by local residents who challenged the premise of our small community in response to my persistent, searching questions. This critique of urban ministry models, then, derives from reflection on and critique of my own ministry practices, which in many ways serve as the invisible backdrop to the analysis presented here. It is my hope that the ideas developed here will reflect lessons learned from my own mistakes, and contribute to helping the wider church de-center whiteness by examining habits and patterns which, however unintentionally, continue to oppress.

**Part I. White Christians in Urban Ministry: Listening to the Conversation**

The phenomena which I hope to analyze is in one sense quite distinct: white evangelical Christians locating themselves in racially diverse, gentrifying neighborhoods for the purpose of forming community and engaging in ministry activities. But these patterns of activity occur within a variety of evangelical urban ministry movements, each which its own set of goals and strategies, some of which overlap but others of which diverge dramatically. In this section I will provide general descriptions of three primary evangelical endeavors—urban church planting, faith-based community development, and missional "parish" communities—focusing on the different forms of interaction between predominantly white newcomers and long-term residents of color. The examples will be drawn from community websites, personal blogs, and literature published by urban ministry practitioners.

The following descriptions do not attempt a comprehensive sociological analysis of these movements, but rather focus on the ways in which practitioners describe their practice, articulate their philosophical and theological rationale for it, and relate various struggles in achieving their vision for ministry—all the while paying particular attention to their understandings of relationship to place and issues of racial justice. I will also include critiques of these models offered by people of color involved in Christian ministry, who challenge various aspects of their thinking and praxis. Obviously not all urban ministry practitioners are white—but the phenomena of white urban ministry groups operating within racially diverse spaces is widespread enough that a significant

body of print and online literature has emerged to analyze and debate the issues involved,

and this will comprise the basic data set here.

**Urban Church Planting**

Sean Benesh is a church planter and researcher located in Portland, Oregon. He

and a cadre of fellow urban ministry practitioners published an in-depth, popular level

discussion of gentrification and urban ministry trends entitled *Vespas, Cafes, Singlespeed*

*Bikes, and Urban Hipsters: Gentrification, Urban Mission, and Church Planting*. In his

Introduction Benesh relates the story of 'Darren,' a fictional prototypical young white

urban church planter deciding where to plant a new church:

> When Darren would visit other cities back east … Boston, Manhattan, Brooklyn
> or Portland, Maine … he noted that their urban cores were becoming increasingly
> desirable to him. The images of the typical inner cities of his childhood were
> quickly being abandoned in favor of something new and better.[2]

Darren's attraction to these "up and coming" urban neighborhoods leads him to select the

gentrifying neighborhood of 'Goldfield':

> Goldfield as a neighborhood is turning the corner in terms of revitalization. Its
> worst days as a high-crime urban neighborhood are over… And so Goldfield
> became "the place." High-end restaurants began opening and old, defunct
> factories began to be converted into swank residential lofts by developers and
> speculators hoping to beat the rush to the next housing boom . And they did. By
> the time Darren and his family moved into Goldfield in the early 2000s the
> neighborhood had already changed dramatically, but it was far from complete. It

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[2] Sean Benesh, Introduction to *Vespas, Cafes, Singlespeed Bikes, and Urban Hipsters: Gentrification, Urban Mission, and Church Planting*, ed. Sean Benesh (Portland, Oregon: Urban Loft Publishers, 2014), 22.

had gone from 93 percent African-American to now about 60 percent . The rest were the newcomers and most of them were ethnic whites.[3]

Benesh's description of Goldfield proceeds to include a series of new businesses such as coffee shops and brewpubs, designed to cater to the young, white, "creative class" moving into the neighborhood. He concludes his sketch of Darren by describing his increasing awareness of the history and demographics of Goldfield, and he recounts the tension and anxiety brought on by the dissonance between his initial intentions for moving into the neighborhood and his recent epiphanies:

> When Darren and his young family moved into Goldfield they had every intention of starting a church for this creative class … Even their church name and logo were strategically crafted with the young hipster in mind … However, just six months later Darren was again feeling uneasy.
> *What about the majority population that is black? How could I have simply and blindly looked over them?* Darren wrote in his journal that morning… He was almost too embarrassed to write those words… With a knot in his stomach he slowly made his way home unsure of what to do next … [4]

While the narrative is fictitious, it reflects Benesh's own concerns and those of most of his co-authors, illustrating a dynamic common to church planting in urban areas. It is a story of gradual awakening, in which a church planter becomes attracted to a place based on certain affinities, moves in with dreams and ambitions of starting a church, and then realizes that his actions had been predicated on insufficient understanding of the people, history, and relational dynamics of the place into which he relocated.

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[3] Ibid., 23-24.

[4] Benesh, 26.

*'Traditional' Urban Church Planting*

I call this mode of urban church planting 'traditional' because it generally seeks to reproduce the worship forms and organizational structures of the churches in which the practitioners were religiously formed. Urban, gentrifying locales are significant largely to the extent that they are perceived as growing, culturally influential, and attractive places to live. As Benesh explains:

> In urban neighborhoods across North America, as reinvestment has occurred and the streets have become safer again, there has been a boom both in business and new church start-ups in these locations which is now bringing church planters back into the city. It was only five years ago that I didn't hear much about church planting in the city, now it seems as if the urban is the new suburban.[5]

Benesh's assessment is confirmed by the emphasis many denominations are placing on church planting in urban settings, including the Southern Baptist Convention. The Convention's North American Mission Board website highlights their SEND initiative, dedicated to planting new SBC churches throughout North America, particularly in urban centers.

> While the work won't be limited to these metropolitan areas, cities are "the mouthpiece of any nation and the place where culture is created," according to Aaron Coe, NAMB's vice president for Mobilization and Marketing and a former church planter in New York. We expect to see a gospel influence radiate from the cities we reach, thus impacting the rest of the nation.[6]

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[5] Benesh, 175.

[6] "Why Send," North American Mission Board, accessed October 8, 2014, http://www.namb.net/overview-why-send/.

That a religious body as large and influential as the SBC is emphasizing urban church planting demonstrates the scope of the trend. While SEND is a broad, nationwide initiative for the SBC, and includes church planters who are people of color,[7] the denomination's size and racial demographics[8] ensure that a high number of white ministry practitioners are either planning or engaging in urban church plants. What an overview of church planting trends cannot tell us is how sensitive these practitioners are to neighborhood history, racial demographics, and gentrification patterns.

While it is difficult to find comprehensive studies of different attitudes to race and place on the part of church planters, the phenomenon has elicited a great deal of response and critique. Christena Cleveland, associate professor of Reconciliation Studies at Bethel University, relates a dialogue she had with urban pastors in Buffalo, New York, a few months after New York governor Andrew Cuomo announced his Buffalo Billion Investment Development Plan.[9] Their discussion centered on the emergence of predominantly white, suburban churches making plans to expand their ministries into the newly supported urban core:

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[7] Notably Dhati Lewis, the black pastor of Blueprint Church and director of SEND's Rebuild Network, which according to their website is "a multi-ethnic movement with an emphasis on developing minority leaders." "Churches," Rebuild Network, accessed October 8, 2014, http://rebuildnetwork.org/churches/#churches.

[8] According to SBC's internal Annual Church Profile Statistics, "nearly 20 percent" of the Convention's congregations are "Non-Anglo." Tobin Perry, "Ethnic Congregations up 66% for Southern Baptists since '98," Baptist Press, January 23, 2013, accessed October 8, 2014, http://www.bpnews.net/39568.

[9] http://www.governor.ny.gov/press/12042012-buffalo-billion-investment-plan

One older African-American pastor said he's heard chilling reports of meetings, in which representatives from many of the suburban churches have gathered around a map of the city and marked each church's "territory," as if Buffalo was theirs to divvy up. The indigenous leaders were not invited to these meetings, nor have they been contacted by these churches. It's as if they don't exist, their churches don't exist, and their expertise doesn't exist. The suburban churches are simply marching in.[10]

While this is a second hand anecdote of what one pastor experienced, the language Cleveland uses illuminates just how many ministry practitioners of color experience white urban church planting efforts. The language of "territory," "marching in," and referring to churches that "don't exist" all speak to a distinct sense of place, and relationship to it, which is being violated by the suburban church plants.

Also salient in this passage is the complaint that indigenous church leaders had not been solicited for their perspective by the newcomers, or invited to meetings where the neighborhood was being discussed. These leaders saw this as a clear oversight, which raises the question of why the suburban church planters did not make such an overture. Most likely it did not even occur to them. If the offense were pointed out to these white suburban churches, would they acknowledge it as an oversight? Or respond with confusion to the notion that such an invitation would be expected? What assumptions about place, and the capacity to move in or out of it, are operating on an instinctive level that would make the prospect of an invitation to indigenous church leaders feel unnecessary, or superfluous? And how do assumptions about the nature of

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[10] Christena Cleveland, "Urban Church ~~Planting~~ Plantations," Christena Cleveland, March 18, 2014, accessed October 8, 2014, http://www.christenacleveland.com/2014/03/urban-church-plantations/#_edn2.

place differ based on one's race, class, and social location? Such questions are rarely asked by white church planting groups, but underlying attitudes toward place have significant effects on the ability of urban ministry practitioners to relate well (or not) to original communities of color in the places where they desire to go.

Certainly there are examples of urban church planters who exhibit more willingness to ask questions and greater awareness of neighborhood dynamics than the groups Cleveland describes. Benesh is an example of a church planter who frequently returns to self-reflective questioning about the role of urban churches in gentrifying neighborhoods and the displacement of long-term residents:

> The city shapes us and we shape the city. In terms of urban gentrification this is certainly a prevailing shaping force that we must address with sensitivity, humility, and a willingness to be open and to learn. We're dealing with lives marked by transition whether it be people moving into urban neighborhoods or those who've given up and are relocating to more affordable housing or to be closer to friends who had left the neighborhood ahead of them.[11]

Benesh's posture demonstrates that even when church planters start from ignorance of cultural and social forces shaping the places which they move into, it is still possible to assume a learning stance and ask, "Is there a way to experience, live through, embrace, or reject gentrification that aligns with God's overall plans, purposes, blueprints, and templates for both urban people and urban places?[12]

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[11] Benesh, 37.

[12] Ibid., 36.

## "Missional" Church Communities

I identified the groups in the previous section as 'traditional' church plants because they tend to employ organizational structures designed primarily to cultivate worshiping communities, and they receive support and structure (in most cases) from pre-existing denominational bodies. There are, however, growing numbers of communities in recent years characterized by an approach more attentive to the physical and economic needs of neighborhoods, less exclusively concerned with proselytizing and more concerned with embodying the love of God within a particular context through relationships and service to the wider community. These groups fall loosely under the nomenclature of 'missional church' or 'missional communities,' representing a theological and praxis-oriented movement among evangelicals which began roughly with the publication of the book *Missional Church* in 1998.[13] While the 'missional' terminology has been used by a variety of ministries and churches, it generally signifies a desire to form faith communities as more holistic enterprises, integrating with their neighborhoods and helping shape community life in accordance with neighborhood needs.[14] One recurring theme affirmed by most who use the label is the idea that "The missional church is an incarnational (versus an attractional) ministry sent to engage a

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[13] Darrell L. Guder, ed., *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1998).

[14] For an overview of the trajectories of how 'missional' has been understood since 1998, see Craig Van Gelder and Dwight J. Zscheile, *The Missional Church in Perspective: Mapping Trends and Shaping the Conversation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011).

postmodern, post-Christendom, globalized context. This understanding requires every

congregation to take on a missionary posture for engaging its local context, with the

missionary engagement shaping everything a congregation does."[15] While there are

varying degrees of comfort among these communities with "missionary" language, what

this means practically is that church plants in this mode are generally more interested in

learning about the particular place in which they locate themselves and shaping their

community forms and activities accordingly.

One particular movement which has actively intensified and propagated the call

for neighborhood integration and focus on place is the "New Parish" movement

originated by Tim Soerens, Paul Sparks, and Dwight Friesen in the Pacific Northwest.

Soerens and Sparks are urban ministry practitioners and Friesen is an associate professor

of Practical Theology at the Seattle School of Theology and Psychology, and together

they organize the annual Inhabit Conference in Seattle, dedicated to helping churches "be

a rooted tangible presence inhabiting the neighborhood."[16] They have also recently

published *The New Parish: How Neighborhood Churches are Transforming Mission,*

*Discipleship, and Community*, which serves as a kind of manifesto for the movement.

"The gospel becomes so much more tangible and compelling when the local church is

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[15] Van Gelder and Zscheile, 4.

[16] Inhabit Conference home, accessed October 8, 2014, http://www.inhabitconference.com/home/.

actually a part of the community," they write, "connected to the struggles of the people and even the land itself."[17]

*The New Parish* does not specifically address the issue of gentrification, nor does it particularly advocate relocation of white Christians into lower income or racially diverse neighborhoods—the emphasis is simply on connecting with the people and institutions in whatever place a community locates itself in. However, many groups resonant with the New Parish model have operated in racially diverse, gentrifying areas, such as those associated with the :Beta: communities network. Operating in seven U.S. cities and Málaga, Spain, :Beta: communities "embody a deep devotion to shared life together in a specific neighborhood, becoming an integral part of the fabric of the place where God has collectively called us to live, love and lead."[18] Each community is made up of 10-20 people who commit to living in proximity to each other in a selected neighborhood, sharing meals on a regular basis, volunteering at local non-profits or Christian ministries, and building relationships with neighborhood residents. Some 'apprentice' for a year; others remain in the neighborhood on a more permanent basis.

Jon Huckins and Jon Hall are founding members of the :Beta: community in San Diego, in the gentrifying Golden Hill neighborhood. Hall owns two businesses in the

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[17] Paul Sparks, Tim Soerens and Dwight J. Friesen, *The New Parish: How Neighborhood Churches are Transforming Mission, Discipleship, and Community* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 23.

[18] "Who We Are," :Beta:, accessed October 8, 2014, http://www.betacommunities.org/who-we-are-1/.

neighborhood while Huckins helps manage the local farmers market, as well as sitting on the local neighborhood council board.[19] They describe the inherent tensions in being gentrifying Christians who "unintentionally find ourselves as being part of the "problem" rather than the solution,"[20] particularly as the forces of gentrification displace lower income people they have encountered and befriended. One of their principal exhortations for missional communities desiring better integration in their surrounding communities is to seek "interdependent relationships" with indigenous community members, "putting ourselves in the hands of others, staking at least part of our success on them, and theirs on us."[21]

However, even efforts like these toward living in a way fully integrated and engaged with local concerns does not mean that such communities easily embody the racial diversity of the neighborhoods in which they operate. Another such missional church is the Little Flowers Community, affiliated with the Mennonite Church Manitoba and located in the West End neighborhood in downtown Winnipeg. The church's website describes their neighborhood as "one of the most culturally and racially diverse communities in Manitoba. Home to many cultural groups—including Portuguese, Ethiopian, Eritrean, Vietnamese, Sudanese, Cree, Ojibwa and many others—it is a

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[19] Jon Huckins and Jon Hall, "Localism and Gentrification," in *Vespas*, 274.

[20] Ibid., 273.

[21] Ibid., 287.

wonderful mosaic of Canada's diversity."[22] The website goes on to describe the

community's values of "trying to be good neighbors" and "life together in intentional

community," with a commitment to "live the justice, peace and love of Christ alongside

our neighbors."[23]

The difficulties involved in embodying this vision as a racially diverse

community become clear in a blog post by one of Little Flowers Community's founders,

Jaime Arpin-Ricci. In "Race, Reconciliation and the Missional Church: A Confession,"

Arpin-Ricci explains that the neighborhood in which his community dwells "is crippled

with the racial divisions that turn neighbour against neighbour, often leading to violence

and murder." Arpin-Ricci explains the efforts which his community has made to increase

their diversity, and the disappointing results:

> We have sought to intentionally diversify our community with mixed success,
> sharing our home and life with people of different races, cultures, socioeconomic
> standing and mental health. However, after nearly 7 years the core community
> remains white, middle class … This is not to say that we do not have strong
> relationships with community leaders and pastors, representing a variety of racial
> and cultural backgrounds…. Those who brought critical leadership, almost
> without exception, ended up investing themselves into ministries, churches,
> organizations, etc. that were predominantly made up of those of their own race….
> And so we remain, genuinely following the vocation we received from the Lord,

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[22] "Community," Little Flowers Community, accessed October 8, 2014, http://littleflowers.ca/community/.

[23] Ibid.

yet discouraged that we seem to be perpetuating the division we were called to mend.[24]

The last statement, about "perpetuating the division we were called to mend," reflects a sentiment common among white church planters and urban ministry practitioners who find a disheartening gap between their aspirations for experiencing racial reconciliation in their communities, and the difficult reality.

In addressing the reasons for the difficulty, it is necessary to ask from what cultural and social position do the initial ideas and organizational models originate. Some black voices within the missional movement have offered critique on these very grounds, including Kyle Canty, associate pastor of Great Commission Church in Philadelphia. In "A Black Missional Critique of the Missional Movement," he speaks about the physical and virtual (online) spaces in which the ideas of the missional church are disseminated and discussed:

> During the past couple of years I've recognized the homogeneity of these circles —most of the speakers are white. Interesting enough, many of the topics that are being written about and presented at these events are topics that I've heard about throughout my life. (e.g., justice, mercy, meeting felt needs, etc.) Well before these were popular topics within evangelicalism, these were important issues among black pastors, preachers and theologians. The black church finds its

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[24] Jaime Arpin-Ricci, "Race, Reconciliation and the Missional Church: A Confession," Jaime Arpin-Ricci: Conversations about Christ and Community, September 15, 2008, accessed October 8, 2014, http://missional.ca/2008/09/race-reconciliation-the-missional-church-a-confession/.

uniqueness in the soil where it is cultivated—usually within marginalized and oppressed communities.[25]

Canty's response to the predominantly white 'missional' movement focuses on the social location of the originators of the movement, emphasizing the irony that their central concerns actually 'originated' elsewhere, in the context and social location of the black church.

Canty's metaphor of the "soil" of marginalized communities speaks powerfully to the issue of place, in terms of how social, economic, geographic, and cultural context generates the values and community forms appropriate to that context. If those values and forms are imported from different socio-economic places, such as white, middle class, suburban neighborhoods, the resulting community forms may militate against racial inclusion in spite of practitioners' best intentions. As Canty explains,

> "If the voices of the missional movement remain largely those of the dominant culture, then there is the possibility that the movement will begin to speak with a privileged accent. Call it what you want—whether it is in a suit, tie and comb over or in skinny jeans, fashion rims, tatted up, it is still coming from a place of access, comfort and homogeneity.[26]

Social location—the "place of access, comfort and homogeneity" which white missional practitioners generally come from—shapes their actions and relational patterns in ways which may lie at the root of their difficulties forming racially diverse community in

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[25] Kyle Canty, "A Black Missional Critique of the Missional Movement," The Rooftop, July 12, 2013, accessed October 8, 2014, http://thecityrooftop.com/2013/07/16/a-black-missional-critique-of-the-missional-movement/.

[26] Ibid.

places shaped by different social forces. While the emphases on learning and engaging in genuinely interdependent relationships represent a positive step toward forming such relationships with diverse populations, it is important to continually probe deeper, to ascertain what aspects of white thinking and modes of being in the world might contribute to perpetuating the very divisions that white urban ministry practitioners are hoping to mend.

## Faith Based Community Development

The last ministry model examined here does not operate within the category of "church" at all—but is rather an initiative to spur economic development through a combination of affordable housing construction and strategic appeals to middle-to-upper class people to relocate to mixed-income residential complexes, all under the rubric of "Gentrification with Justice." The founder of this movement is Bob Lupton, and his FCS (Focused Community Strategies) Urban Ministries has been engaging in sustained community development activities in Atlanta neighborhoods for the last few decades.[27] Lupton's approach is based on an extensively developed theory of the relationship between poverty and place—how particular social contexts create conditions that sustain cycles of poverty. In Lupton's writing, "the physical environment is portrayed as playing

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[27] Katherine Hankins and Andy Walter, "'Gentrification with Justice': An Urban Ministry Collective and the Practice of Place-making in Atlanta's Inner-city Neighbourhoods," *Urban Studies* 49 (2012): 1507-1526.

an interactive role in generating a range of deleterious social processes and patterns that

foster a place of poverty, crime and disempowerment for 'good' residents in the

neighbourhood."[28] Indeed, Lupton is candid about his view that a certain amount of

displacement in the gentrification process can be a positive development:

> But must gentrification always spell displacement for the poor? To some degree, yes. Yet displacement is not entirely bad. There are drug dealers and other rogues that need to be dislodged from a community if it is going to become a healthy place to raise children. Over-crowded tenements and flop houses should be thinned out or cleaned up and this inevitably means displacement of some of the vulnerable along with their predators.[29]

However, Lupton is not interested in simply letting gentrification run its course.

He advocates strongly for building affordable housing for lower-income people in an

effort to minimize displacement. This affordable housing is purchased very strategically

with regard to location—lower income units are never concentrated in one place, but FCS

"instead attempts to put households with different incomes and social status next to and

across the street from each other."[30] This reflects Lupton's conviction that dismantling

entrenched poverty requires the influx of 'strategic neighbours,' people of higher social

standing who are "also committed to the social and physical health of impoverished

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[28] Ibid., 1515.

[29] Robert Lupton, "Gentrification with Justice," ByFaith Online, June 1, 2006, accessed October 8, 2014, http://byfaithonline.com/gentrification-with-justice/.

[30] Hankins and Walter, 1518.

neighbourhoods."[31] This again reflects Lupton's philosophy on what kind of communities

are needed in order to reduce poverty:

> The romantic notion that the culture of a dependent, poverty community must somehow be protected from the imposition of outside values is as naive as it is destructive. Neighborhoods that have hemorrhaged for decades from the "up and out" migration of their best and brightest need far more than government grants, human services and urban ministries to restore their health. More than anything else, they need the return of the very kinds of home-owning, goal-driven, faith-motivated neighbors that once gave their community vitality. In a word, they need the gentry.[32]

One aspect in which Lupton's approach differs markedly from the traditional and

missional church communities discussed above is that Lupton is very consciously and

proactively engaging in the dynamics of gentrification. In fact, he is actively propelling

those forces, albeit with a conscientious effort to enable as many original residents as

possible to remain and share in the fruits of neighborhood revitalization. His approach is

also grounded in a developed theory of place, and its relationship to community.

Questions remain, however, about the extent to which Lupton's views and

practices generate the most just results for original neighborhood residents. Hankins and

Walter, in their study of FCS, note that "As yet, there is no research into the contribution

that this organisation—and others like it across the country—has made in shaping

Atlanta's geography and, in particular, the landscape of urban poverty."[33] Additionally, a

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[31] Ibid., 1518.

[32] Lupton, "Gentrification with Justice."

[33] Hankins and Walter, 1522.

study by Loretta Lees argues that "there is a poor evidence base for the widespread policy

assumption that gentrification will help increase the social mix, foster social mixing and

thereby increase the social capital and social cohesion of inner-city communities."[34] She

cites a case in Toronto in which "a deliberate policy of social mixing was initiated in

1999, [and] the fall-out was homeowner NIMBYism, significant rent increases and tenant

displacement."[35] Lees casts doubt on the premise that constructing communities with a

mix of incomes and social status will necessarily result in uplift and opportunity for

poorer residents. While in many ways the jury is still out on how initiatives such as

Lupton's will work out in their particular contexts, it is necessary to at least pose the

question of the extent to which the ministry of FCS reflects underlying assumptions and

attitudes toward poor communities that are shaped in white privileged contexts rather

than in the contexts of those who are ostensibly being "helped".

We therefore see a variety of ministry models that share key features in common

—each of them involve white Christians entering places populated largely by people of

color to engage in ministries intended to generate and foster community. The strategies

may be different, and they may focus on different demographics within their

neighborhoods, but each is an effort to address the question: what does it mean to live

well together in shared space? This naturally raises corollary questions of how one

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[34] Loretta Lees, "Gentrification and Social Mixing: Towards an Inclusive Urban Renaissance?" *Urban Studies* 45:12 (November 2008): 2450.

[35] Ibid., 2457.

determines what "living well together" means, how the strategies for achieving it derive

from the socio-cultural backgrounds of the ministry practitioners, and which populations

actually benefit and experience flourishing community as a result of these endeavors. My

analysis will be focusing primarily on the first two questions (although the third will

inevitably be addressed as the context for analyzing the others), as we examine social and

psychological structures which influence the kinds of projects described here.

## **Part II. The Context of White Urban Ministry: Structures of Gentrification**

The previous chapter focused on the specific phenomena of white urban ministries, relying largely on descriptions by practitioners and personal responses by Christians of color in ministry settings. These ministry patterns exist, however, within larger social structures which influence their economic and cultural shape. Specifically, the forms of urban ministry I am analyzing all operate, to varying degrees, within the context of urban gentrification. This chapter will therefore begin with a definition and brief outline of urban gentrification in North America, taking time to address its economic and social effects on established neighborhood residents as reported by journalists and analyzed by geographers. Not all white urban ministries operate in actively gentrifying neighborhoods—some simply seek out areas which are economically disadvantaged and racially diverse—but even in these cases the presence of ministry groups can contribute to initial gentrifying processes. I will then examine different motives among white urban ministry practitioners, including theologies of place and mission, as well as a desire for "authenticity" which derives from a disaffection with suburban lifestyles. Next I will address the tensions involved when white Christians conduct urban ministries in gentrifying contexts, from the inherent stress of displacement to the importation of white cultural community forms into predominantly non-white neighborhoods. Finally, I will analyze different perspectives on gentrification expressed by white ministry practitioners.

## Understanding Gentrification

While urban gentrification is not uniform, manifesting in different ways specific to differing urban contexts, it nevertheless exhibits a consistent enough pattern to be analyzed as a distinct phenomena. Gina M. Pérez, professor of Comparative American Studies at Oberlin, offers a working definition:

> The term refers to an economic and social process whereby private capital (real estate firms, developers) and individual homeowners and renters reinvest in fiscally neglected neighborhoods through housing rehabilitation, loft conversions, and the construction of new housing stock. Unlike urban renewal, gentrification is a gradual process, occurring one building or block at a time, slowly reconfiguring the neighborhood landscape of consumption and residence by displacing poor and working-class residents unable to afford to live in "revitalized" neighborhoods with rising rents, property taxes, and new businesses catering to an upscale clientele.[36]

Gentrification is here described as an incremental transformation of place, from "financially neglected" into one considered "revitalized" by those with the economic means to inhabit it. However, a fully textured account of gentrification must move beyond income levels and construction projects and address the matrix of culture, relationships, and economics that constitutes *place*. For geographers, place, "as a topic of investigation, highlights the weaving together of social relations and human-environment interactions."[37] Roger Friedland further explains that "place is the fusion of space and

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[36] Gina M. Pérez, *Near Northwest Side Story: Migration, Displacement, and Puerto Rican Families* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 139.

[37] Paul C. Adams, Steven Hoelscher, and Karen E. Till, eds., "Place in Context: Rethinking Human Geographies," in *Textures of Place: Exploring Humanist Geographies* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), xiv.

experience, a space filled with meaning, a source of identity. It is also a specific context

for our actions, a configuration of objects and events in space, a *milieu*, as the French

say."[38] When a place experiences gentrification, it is not only the architecture or the

average income which changes (though those factors are significant), but social networks

and experiences of identity and security are shifted and dismantled as some residents and

businesses move out and different residents and businesses move in.

One consistent effect of gentrification in almost all of its manifestations is the

displacement of people of color, to the point that Rowland Atkinson and Gary Bridge

identify gentrification as the "New Urban Colonialism":

> Contemporary gentrification has elements of colonialism as a cultural force in its
> privileging of whiteness, as well as the more class-based identities and
> preferences in urban living. In fact not only are the new middle-class gentrifiers
> predominantly white but the aesthetic and cultural aspects of the process assert a
> white Anglo appropriation of urban space and urban history.[39]

The reasons for this correlation between gentrification and the "whitening" of

neighborhoods are various and complex, but one primary reason is simply the

correspondence of race and class in U.S. society as a whole. Generations of structural

racism including segregation, employment discrimination, and housing policy have

resulted in deep wealth and income disparities between people of color, particularly

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[38] Roger Friedland, "Space, Place, and Modernity: The Geographical Moment," *Contemporary Sociology* 21, no. 1 (January 1992), 14.

[39] Rowland Atkinson and Gary Bridge, "Globalisation and the New Urban Colonialism," in *The Gentrification Debates*, ed. Japonica Brown-Saracino (New York: Routledge, 2010), 52.

African Americans, and whites. Pamela Joy Strand emphasizes the wealth gap in her

article "Inheriting Inequality: Wealth, Race, and the Laws of Succession":

> Where one generation has wealth—to weather economic reverses and health
> problems, to fund education … the next generation enjoys a leg up. Where such
> wealth is not available, the springs to give the succeeding generation an economic
> bounce go missing.
>     The concentration of Blacks at the lower end of the wealth spectrum,
> combined with lesser Black upward social mobility and greater Black downward
> social mobility, represents the current manifestation of White economic advantage
> and Black economic disadvantage.[40]

Gentrification occurs in neighborhoods which have been "financially neglected,"

in Pérez's words, and are populated by economically disadvantaged people unable to

remain when changes arrive. Due to the nature of structural racism, many people thus

displaced from such neighborhoods are likely to be people of color. This is not simply

accidental. As Karen J. Gibson explains, the financial neglect Pérez refers to—the very

factor which brings rents down to a level attractive and affordable for incoming

gentrifiers—can be best understood as a result of *disinvestment*, which "involves the

systematic withdrawal of capital (the lifeblood of the housing market) and the neglect of

public services such as schools; building, street, and park maintenance; garbage

collection; and transportation." Focusing on the historically black Albina area in northern

Portland, Gibson outlines how this capital withdrawal is carried out by "Realtors,

bankers, and speculators, which systematically reduces the worth or value of housing in a

process called *devalorization*." This often involves appeals to fears of racial turnover, and

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[40] Pamela Joy Strand, "Inheriting Inequality: Wealth, Race, and the Laws of Succession," *Oregon Law Review* 89 (2010), 476-477.

intentional devaluing of African American neighborhoods through practices of

redlining.[41] Histories of disinvestment are a direct source of tension between long-term

neighborhood residents of color and incoming largely white populations taking advantage

of low rents and revitalization initiatives. As Gibson explains, "While there are positive

aspects to the revitalization of Albina neighborhoods, many Black residents wonder why

it did not happen earlier, when it was their community."[42]

There is another common characteristic of people entering these kinds of

neighborhoods—not only are they largely white and middle class, but also constitute

what many refer to as the "creative class," a broad term which refers to those who make

their living in scientific, technological, or artistic pursuits.[43] According to Sean Benesh,

many city governments actively pursue urban policies designed to attract younger,

talented, creative people, on the premise that this population will drive economic growth:

> City after city across the United States has bought into this rhetoric and has begun
> reinvesting in and regenerating their central cities. Even old northern cities that
> were once the epicenter of industrialization are shedding old labels and industries
> in favor of wooing the creative class back into their declining downtowns.[44]

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[41] Karen J. Gibson, "Bleeding Albina: A History of Community Disinvestment,
1940-2000," *Transforming Anthropology* 15, no. 1 (2007): 5.

[42] Ibid., 4.

[43] The term "creative class" was popularized by Richard Florida in his book *The Rise of
the Creative Class*, 10th Anniversary ed. (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2012). "Creativity—'the
ability to create meaningful new forms,' as *Webster's* dictionary puts it—has become the decisive
force of competitive advantage. In virtually every industry … the long-run winners are those who
can create and keep creating" (6).

[44] Benesh, 76-77.

This influx of artists often operates within a broader narrative in the dominant culture—in which formerly dangerous, dilapidated neighborhoods are finally receiving an aesthetic and economic boost from creative types willing to be "urban pioneers." As Neil Smith explains in "Building the Frontier Myth,"

> The social meaning of gentrification is increasingly constructed through the vocabulary of the frontier myth … Newspapers habitually extol the courage of urban "homesteaders," the adventurous spirit and rugged individualism of the new settlers, brave "urban pioneers," presumably going where, in the words of *Star Trek*, no (white) man has ever gone before.[45]

A clear example of this narrative frame can be found in the philly.com article "Reclaiming a Corner of Kensington," which tells the story of two artists organizing a festival in a northern Philadelphia neighborhood. They call it the Force Field Project, "a two-day festival of installation art, concerts, and dance parties at MaKen Studios, two enormous, grimy factories that are being renovated into studio, fabrication, and live-work spaces." Specifically referring to the organizing artists as "urban pioneers," the article expresses their hopes to "bring more than a thousand artists and fans to the impoverished and crime-ridden Harrowgate section of Kensington - and maybe turn some of them into future tenants."[46] The description of the factory and neighborhood as "grimy" and "impoverished and crime-ridden" convey an affective narrative in which the creative, energetic "pioneers" bravely enter a dark, frightening place to "reclaim" it by means of

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[45] Neil Smith, "Building the Frontier Myth," in Brown-Saracino, 113.

[46] Samantha Melamed, "Reclaiming a corner of Kensington," philly.com, June 21, 2014, accessed October 15, 2014, http://articles.philly.com/2014-06-21/entertainment/50741583_1_neighborhood-tenants-artists.

this festival, in hopes that others like them will follow, buy homes, and commence the transformation of the neighborhood into a "livable" place.

What is important to note here is that gentrification patterns constitute a broad socio-economic context in which most urban ministries operate. Whatever distinct forms and social value urban ministries may contribute, they do so within a larger social narrative and set of economic realities. The Kensington article also illustrates that a form of redemption narrative is already in place when describing gentrification patterns, independent of any theological concerns. This wider context is important to keep in mind as we focus on urban ministry practitioners and their rationales and motivations for moving into racially diverse urban spaces.

## Christians in Urban Ministry: Rationales and Motivations

### *The Importance of the Urban Place*

As mentioned in the previous chapter, there has been a growing movement in recent decades among evangelical circles to emphasize church planting and other forms of ministry in major metropolitan areas. To an extent this simply reflects the natural role of cities as population centers and influencers of culture, burt it has also been buttressed by a theological trend emphasizing the importance of place, and specifically the importance of the city as the predominant environment for human community and a center of divine concern and activity. One influential evangelical text in this vein is Ray

Bakke's *A Theology as Big as the City*. In this popular work, Bakke takes his readers on a

survey of biblical literature, emphasizing how its urban settings shape the primary

concerns and therefore the theology of the biblical authors. In particular, he exhorts

churches to orient the focus of their mission toward urban centers:

> As we move away from a world of nations to a world of interconnected
> multinational cities, it's clear that the frontier of mission has shifted. The majority
> of the world's non-Christians will not be geographically distant peoples, but
> culturally distant peoples who often reside together within the shadows of urban
> spires in the metro areas of every continent.[47]

Another voice expressing theological interest in the city is Eric O. Jacobsen, a

Presbyterian pastor and a member of the Congress for the New Urbanism (CNU), which

promotes itself as "the leading organization promoting walkable, mixed-use

neighborhood development, sustainable communities and healthier living conditions."[48]

In *Sidewalks in the Kingdom: New Urbanism and the Christian Faith*, Jacobsen describes

his vision for mixed-use urban planning (a vision not dissimilar to Bob Lupton's),

grounding it in his understanding of the importance of place, and the city in particular, as

a source of identity:

> The identity of a city can form and deepen the identity of its inhabitants. It can
> provide roots that remain with a person even when they no longer reside within
> the city of their origin. This idea is assumed in the biblical narrative with its
> descriptions of Jesus of Nazareth and Paul of Tarsus…. In our current culture, this

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[47] Ray Bakke, *A Theology as Big as the City* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 13.

[48] "What is CNU?" Congress for the New Urbanism, accessed October 15, 2014, http://www.cnu.org/who_we_are.

connection between identity and place is being lost because we no longer seem to understand the importance of place.[49]

Jacobsen's emphasis on the city as place is narrowed even further in *The New Parish*, which designates the neighborhood as the primary unit of social relationship and identity formation. The authors use the metaphor of *rooting* to express their understanding of neighborhood engagement: "Rooting is … coming to know your neighborhood and becoming one of its characters…. It happens as you open up and let your place teach you about its shape, geography, history, peoples, cultures, and so on. As you come to know it you will see your need of it, and its need for you."[50] This emphasis on the importance of place in facilitating human connection, and the importance of developing a relationship with a place itself, comes to the fore in much recent writing on urban ministry.[51] What makes such dialogue relevant for the present discussion is the potential tension inherent when people shaped by one form of place (middle class white Christians) enter into places shaped by very different economic and cultural factors— namely, in the context of gentrification. When white urban ministry practitioners move into lower income, non-white neighborhoods, what felt sense of place do they bring with

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[49] Eric O. Jacobsen, *Sidewalks in the Kingdom: New Urbanism and the Christian Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2003), 119. For further development of this theme see also Philip Sheldrake, *The Spiritual City: Theology, Spirituality, and the Urban* (Malden, MA: Wiley, 2014.)

[50] Sparks, Soerens, and Friesen, 136.

[51] See for example Glenn Smith, "My Neighborhood is Gentrifying! Where on Earth Does Urban Ministry Need to Go?" in Benesh, 254: "The consequences of the decline of sociability also affect the very nature of our urban understanding."

them from the contexts in which their identities were formed? How do those intuitions shape their modes of relating in their newly adopted places?

*Christian Community Development*

Another paradigm which has proven highly influential within evangelical communities as an impetus for urban mission is a community development model initiated by author, minister, and activist John M. Perkins, founder of the Christian Community Development Association (CCDA). CCDA is a network of (mostly evangelical) individuals and organizations committed to a particular vision of urban development, one of "wholistically restored communities with Christians fully engaged in the process of transformation."[52] Their understanding of what this entails revolves around eight core principles, the first three of which were developed by Perkins himself and are the most widely known: Relocation, Reconciliation, and Redistribution.[53]

The first, Relocation, frames the act of moving into an economically disadvantaged neighborhood as "incarnational ministry," in that it is understood to emulate the pattern of God living among God's beloved creation in the person of Jesus Christ. The act of relocation is also cast in practical terms: "By relocating, a person will understand most clearly the real problems facing the poor; and then he or she may begin

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[52] "Organizational Membership," Christian Community Development Association, accessed October 15, 2014, http://www.ccda.org/members/organizational-membership.

[53] These three principles are elaborated most fully in John M. Perkins, *With Justice for All: A Strategy for Community Development*, 3rd ed. (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 2007).

to look for real solutions…. Effective ministries plant and build communities of believers

that have a personal stake in the development of their neighborhoods."[54] The principles of

Reconciliation and Redistribution then speak to the issues of breaking down racial

barriers in (primarily church) community life and the development of economic

opportunity, through finding "creative avenues to develop jobs, schools, health centers,

home ownership opportunities, and other enterprises of long-term development."[55] Taken

together, these three principles have provided a framework for the purpose and strategy

of many urban ministry organizations: live in disadvantaged neighborhoods for at least

several years, pursue relationships across social barriers, particularly in the context of

faith communities, and initiate enterprise geared toward improving residents' economic

circumstances.

The influence of the CCDA and the Perkins model is widespread. Bob Lupton,

founder of Focused Community Strategies described in the previous chapter, is listed as a

national board member of the organization, and Lupton identifies himself as a "Christian

community developer" on the FCS website.[56] Another well-known evangelical and urban

ministry practitioner is Shane Claiborne, co-founder of The Simple Way missional

community in Philadelphia's Kensington neighborhood (the site of the arts festival

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[54] "Relocation," Christian Community Development Association, accessed October 15, 2014, http://www.ccda.org/about/ccd-philosophy/relocation.

[55] "Reconciliation" and "Redistribution," Christian Community Development Association, accessed October 15, 2014, http://www.ccda.org.

[56] "Who We Are," FCS Urban Ministries, accessed October 15, 2014, http://fcsministries.org/who-we-are/.

described in the previous section). Claiborne has been a plenary speaker at CCDA

conferences and has co-authored a book with Perkins,[57] and several aspects of the Simple

Way community reflect CCDA principles. In addition to sharing meals and engaging in

spiritual practices, community members focus on building neighborhood relationships

and habitually extend hospitality to residents, publish a quarterly newsletter entitled

*Conspire*, and participate in demonstrations of civil disobedience.[58]

These popular theologies of place and the CCDA principles together make up a

theological and philosophical environment that shapes the convictions and imaginations

of many evangelicals interested in urban ministry. On a personal note, ideas such as these

were extremely formative in my own aspirations to live in a poor, non-white

neighborhood—they provided me with rationale and motivation and shaped my images

of what I hoped to experience when I began. What needs to be further explored is the

extent to which these models, as they are most commonly understood and implemented

by white urban ministry practitioners, shape expectations and habits in ways that either

dismantle or reproduce larger systems of white hegemony, including systems of

gentrification.

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[57] Shane Claiborne and John M. Perkins, *Follow Me to Freedom: Leading as an Ordinary Radical* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 2009).

[58] http://www.thesimpleway.org/about/.

*The Appeal of Authenticity*

The final underlying motivation I wish to discuss is succinctly described by Sean

Benesh as "The Quest for Authenticity." The current cohort of young, creative gentrifiers,

including church planters, is looking for a connection to history and rooted community in

the hopes of finding a quality of life more vibrant than what modern middle-class malaise

can provide:

> Maybe it was after watching one too many movies like The Matrix that something
> stirred within us, a recoiling in our core to get back to where we felt alive, that our
> life really does matter and make a difference , and that what we are experiencing
> is truly life and not some faux version or a lie…. Our chief complaints seem
> nowadays to be about spotty wifi, a data plan for our smart phones that's too
> expensive, our commutes are too long, too many of the commercials during the
> Super Bowl are just plain bad, The Office television series has come to an end, or
> that our favorite coffee shop has raised its prices 25 cents.[59]

In contrast to this existence, the old buildings and abandoned lofts of the inner city

beckon with a promise of "something old ... cobblestone streets, old brick buildings, and

a sense of grittiness, rawness , and authenticity."[60] The desires that Benesh expresses in

this passage are identified by Japonica Brown-Saracino as representing a particular

classification of gentrifier, with an ethic and set of motivations distinct from those

focused on economic and aesthetic neighborhood transformation:

> I call this ethic and set of practices *social preservation*; the culturally motivated
> choice of certain people, who tend to be highly educated and residentially mobile,

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[59] Benesh, 97.

[60] Ibid., 98.

to live in the central city or small town in order to live in authentic social space, embodied by the sustained presence of "original" residents.[61]

Exactly what makes a place feel "authentic" is difficult to define, but for the most part it is defined in opposition to what Justin G. Wilford denotes as "the suburban fringe, exurbia, sprawl, or postsuburbia." These communities on the edges of metropolitan areas are often "newly formed fragmented, dispersed, and transitory,"[62] lacking precisely the sense of grounding in place that practitioners such as Benesh or the authors of *The New Parish* advocate for. Jacobsen decries the lack of public spaces characteristic of suburban living, for "Without public spaces, it can be very difficult to develop new relationships or, in some cases, to encounter other people at all. I remember my stint in the suburbs as being a particularly lonely time of my life."[63] Wilford describes the social life generated by postsuburban spaces as characterized by "insular privacy, disconnected anxiety, and fragmented individualism,"[64] and goes on to describe how suburban megachurches such as Saddleback Valley Community Church structure themselves to address these needs. For urban church planters like Benesh, however, the loneliness inherent in suburban life cannot be ameliorated; it must be abandoned in favor of older urban neighborhoods. "The appeal of these neighborhoods," Benesh writes, "is the attempt to reconnect with the past,

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[61] Japonica Brown-Saracino, "Social Preservationists and the Quest for Authentic Community," in Brown-Saracino, 261.

[62] Justin G. Wilford, *Sacred Subdivisions: The Postsuburban Transformation of American Evangelicalism* (New York: New York University Press, 2012), 5-6.

[63] Jacobsen, 79.

[64] Wilford, 70.

carve out a sense of identity, cultivate a deeper sense of place, and evade the negative effects of all-things hyper-modern."[65]

In addition to a sense of history and authenticity, gentrifiers of the *social preservation* class that Brown-Saracino describes are also attracted to the idea of living among a racially and culturally diverse population. In the case of urban ministry practitioners this motivation can often dovetail with a desire to facilitate racial reconciliation along the lines of the CCDA model. Benesh takes great pains to distance himself from Neil Smith's "urban pioneer" classification described above: "I want to make it clear that not all gentrifiers are colonialists or pioneers, because many are simply drawn to the greater vibrancy of multicultural urban neighborhoods."[66] While fully cognizant of the reality of displacement of long-term residents of color, he focuses on the motives of gentrifiers like himself. "I suppose one could argue that in some ways we were drawn to this notion of being part of a social experiment. It appealed to us to be living in a complex urban environment. But there was nothing pioneering or colonialist about it ... we simply loved it. As a matter of fact, we didn't want the neighborhood to change."[67]

Whether the sense of being in a "social experiment" can truly be distinguished from a "pioneering" mentality is a question for subsequent chapters. What is clear,

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[65] Benesh, 102.

[66] Benesh, 107.

[67] Ibid.

however, is that the movement of white urban ministry practitioners into diverse urban

neighborhoods emanates from deeply felt needs for identity and vibrant living connected

to a sense of place. What is less often articulated is that the appeal of these urban places is

shaped both by the presence of non-white residents and, indirectly, by the very economic

distress generated by a history of white abandonment and economic disinvestment.

Disinvestment policy and resultant struggling economic conditions are what leave older

urban buildings with sufficiently low value to make moving into them affordable for the

younger creative class. Similarly, the unsatisfying quality of suburban life that

practitioners like Benesh are trying to escape was generated by racially motivated moving

patterns like white flight. The motivations and practices of urban ministry practitioners,

and gentrifiers in general, often exhibit a dissociation from history which ends up

producing many tensions and conflicts with long-term residents, to which we will now

turn.

## The Reality on the Ground: Accounts of Gentrification

The previous sections outlined the widespread social context of gentrification and

examined common theological and affective motivations for urban ministry practitioners,

emphasizing how the particular forms and emphases of those motives reflect broader

geographic and economic patterns of social movement. In order to investigate the central

premise of this thesis—that white urban ministry practices operate with an underlying

psychological habit of ontological expansiveness—it is also necessary to survey the consequences of gentrification and urban ministry, both intended and unintended. If a shared goal of most urban ministry forms is to create healthy forms of community, it is important to hear from those on the ground—long time residents affected by gentrification, and urban ministry practitioners directly facing the tensions—in order to assess what quality of community is actually being formed.

Journalistic accounts and opinion writing on gentrification are widespread. A paradigmatic example is the New York Times article "One Man's Music Is His Neighbor's Headache," written by Corey Kilgannon. It tells the story of Bill Lee, a jazz bassist and pianist who has played on records with Bob Dylan and Aretha Franklin, and whose son Spike is a celebrated filmmaker. "Since 1969, whenever inspiration struck, Mr. Lee was liable to be at home, composing, practicing, rehearsing, or playing with other musicians" without incident or complaint. Within one year, however, "17 noise complaints have been filed about the Lee residence on a street called Washington Park. Most, if not all, were called in by a woman in the brownstone next door who moved in three years ago."[68] While noise complaints in response to music are not unique to gentrifying neighborhoods, other neighbors of Mr. Lee call the dispute "emblematic of the changes in Fort Greene, a neighborhood long known for its diversity and creative residents, and one that has seen an influx of higher-income settlers." A statement by Lee's

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[68] Corey Kilgannon, "One Man's Music Is His Neighbor's Headache," *The New York Times*, May 31, 2013, accessed October 16, 2014, http://www.nytimes.com/2013/06/01/nyregion/in-brooklyn-bill-lees-music-is-his-neighbors-headache.html?_r=2&

wife succinctly illustrates the nature of the tension: "You didn't just move into a house, you moved into a community."[69] A similar sentiment is expressed by Chinaka Hodge in an open letter, "The Gentrifier's Guide to Getting Along," in which she exhorts her audience of white gentrifiers to "Get to know your neighbors. Do the basics—the same way you'd act if you moved to Paris or Jakarta. Learn the language. Study the social cues." She also encourages political involvement which centers the concerns of original residents: "Engage in politics in a respectful way. Make your issues the issues we've been mobilizing around for years: the success of students in our underfunded schools, the benefits of community policing, the removal of ecological hazards in our highly industrialized neighborhoods."[70]

What these accounts express is the frustration experienced when new gentrifying residents demonstrate unwillingness to adapt to the social norms of the place into which they have moved, and instead insist on importing the norms and expectations from the places in which they have been shaped. Even when the ostensible goal is to integrate well within a neighborhood, significant differences in culture and perspective based on social location can make this social integration more difficult than initially expected or even understood. This dynamic affects church plants or urban ministries with even the best

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[69] Ibid.

[70] Chinaka Hodge, "The Gentrifier's Guide to Getting Along," San Francisco Magazine, May 30, 2014, accessed October 16, 2014, http://www.modernluxury.com/san-francisco/story/the-gentrifiers-guide-getting-along.

intentions, as they often contribute to division between racial populations, as Portland

pastor Cole Brown explains:

> By building their church upon New Neighborhood [Brown's term for gentrifiers]
> leaders; by covering their facilities, website, and promo materials in New
> Neighborhood art; by filling their services with New Neighborhood music,
> preaching styles, and sermon topics; and by specifically targeting New
> Neighborhood residents these churches unintentionally become yet another
> emblem of the New Neighborhood and its utter disinterest in the communities,
> values, spirituality, and people of the Old Neighborhood.[71]

However desirous new urban church plants or ministries may be of building inter-racial

relationships, if they base their communities on familiar cultural forms they enact social

barriers to building those connections.

As a pastor of a multi-ethnic church who describes himself as "a white man who

has lived in the Old Neighborhood since long before gentrification began," Brown

occupies a position somewhat different from most of the other white urban practitioners

described here. His draws from his many years observing displacement patterns in

predominantly black Portland neighborhoods to detail their effects on black communities

and the black church:

> First, because there is no longer a geographically discernible "African-American
> community" black Christians in my city no longer have the option of attending a
> neighborhood church…. Second, as neighborhood churches decline through
> gentrification so does church participation. Churches in the Old Neighborhood
> can attest that the longer the distance that one must travel to participate in church
> life the less frequently they will participate.[72]

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[71] Cole Brown, "Church Planting in Gentrifying Neighborhoods. Part 2: Emmaus
Church," in Benesh, 194.

[72] Ibid., 195-196.

These social dynamics are further developed in the *Portland Monthly* article "By the

Grace of God," which relates the fate of several of Portland's black churches in the last

couple of decades, including the Highland Christian Center. This church grew rapidly in

northeast Portland in the 1990s, but faced challenges as gentrification accelerated:

> The congregation had labored hard to better the neighborhood, holding Saturday
> cleanups, working with the police to rout drug houses, and engaging the kids who
> were hanging out. But as more properties changed hands and newcomers arrived,
> nearly all white, new kinds of tension arose. Police calls about crack houses
> gradually were replaced by complaints about church services' noise and the lack
> of Sunday parking.[73]

Eventually the church was pressured to sell their building and ended up moving farther

east, following in the footsteps of other black residents and churches. This example

illustrates how the very presence of white gentrifiers, including those involved in urban

ministries, dramatically impact the lives of long-term residents regardless of their

intentions, or even their direct actions. The endeavor of new arrivals to find a sense of

place often disrupts established places among poorer, non-white residents, fragmenting

communities which often took generations to develop.

## White Attitudes toward Gentrification

Given the pervasiveness and overwhelming effects of gentrification patterns, and

their direct relevance to urban ministry, an examination of what white urban ministry

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[73] Aaron Scott, "By the Grace of God," *Portland Monthly*, February 17, 2012, accessed
October 16, 2014, http://www.portlandmonthlymag.com/news-and-profiles/culture/articles/
african-american-churches-north-portland-march-2012.

practitioners say about gentrification should prove instructive, to indicate what kinds of

underlying thought patterns shape their conception of the issue. We have already seen in

the previous chapter how community developer Bob Lupton speaks about gentrification,

maintaining that "displacement is not entirely bad" in that it drives out people who are

prone to commit crimes or simply erode the cultural dynamics necessary for financial

success.[74] Cole Brown, on the other hand, describes gentrification exclusively in the

negative as an "economic, political, and spiritual injustice" which is "leading many black

Christians away from the blessing of community and into loneliness."[75]

Other authors take a more nuanced view, with the preponderance of white

practitioners cited here basically accepting gentrification as an unavoidable fact of life

which ministries must work within and around. Jacobsen, who earlier extolled the virtues

of rooting in a particular place, expresses a cautious but generally positive view:

> While gentrification is a sensitive issue (and needs to be watched for its most
> insidious effects), when we consider the alternatives, it really seems to be the best
> option for our cities. Not only does gentrification improve the residential and
> commercial appeal of an area, it brings in vital tax dollars, which can improve the
> schools and infrastructure of inner cities.[76]

The casual reference to "improving the residential and commercial appeal" reveals a

rather superficial reflection on which populations may find what kind of neighborhoods

"appealing," as well as minimal attention paid to displacement and disruption. A

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[74] Chapter 1, page 16.

[75] Brown, 200.

[76] Jacobsen, 150.

reference to "insidious effects" does appear but there is no development in the ensuing pages of how those effects can be reduced.

Benesh offers a detailed approach to the topic that is probably best described as an attempt to be even-handed. He addresses the more damaging effects of gentrification while frequently returning to a qualified optimistic view of its overall impact on urban settings. In his chapter "Is Gentrification Positive or Negative?" Benesh does spend pages acknowledging "the process of poverty diffusion, relocation, and even prior to that the redlining where neighborhoods were purposely disinvested so they would degrade even more."[77] His understanding of gentrification is extensively informed by analysts like Neil Smith and Atkinson and Bridge cited above. However, Benesh also invests significant space arguing that overall gentrification is "a mixed bag, a mixed blessing." Echoing Lupton, he declares that "we need to be honest and say that there is nothing glamorous or wholesome about urban neighborhoods that are war zones and pockets of social unrest." He also appreciates the way in which it affirms development in central cities, in line with his preference for the urban core over suburbia: "Rather than outward suburban sprawl, the focus instead is on infill or back fill."[78]

Benesh also expresses a view which conflates a kind of social optimism with theology, when he cautiously broaches the possibility that gentrification could be a process within the sovereignty of God:

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[77] Benesh, 122.

[78] Ibid., 126-128.

> I'm sure you're probably squirming right now since gentrification is most often associated with an evil (or secular ) process right up there with genocide and teenage acne. I am not saying it is ... or isn't. But where we engage in urban mission is precisely in these neighborhoods and districts. This stirring of the cultural soil in the gentrification process creates ripe conditions for the church to engage with the Gospel both in proclamation and presence.[79]

He follows up this proposal with the possibility that in gentrifying neighborhoods, "the path to renaissance is first one of pain, hardship, and conflict," and calls for urban ministry practitioners to refrain from making simple assessments of gentrification, instead addressing their energies toward learning how to minister to people within it.

What needs to be interrogated in Benesh's view is not simply his theological perspective (which has a long pedigree in evangelical Protestant circles) but the social location from which he speaks. On one level, the acceptance of gentrification expressed by Benesh and Jacobsen as an unavoidable force simply reflects a pragmatic realism— short of a radical restructuring of the entire U.S. economy gentrification no doubt is with us to stay for quite some time. But it bears closer examination as to why white Christians, who have closely studied but will never experience first-hand the negative effects of gentrification, should place such emphasis on its positive aspects to the extent of constructing redemptive narratives around the processes. It raises questions of the extent to which the philosophy and narrative of *place* offered by white urban ministry practitioners is shaped by lived experiences of places shaped by considerable privilege—

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[79] Benesh, 230.

in short, by the experience of being white. This matrix of experience will be the subject

of the next chapter.

**Part III. The Context of White Urban Ministry: The Social Ontology of Whiteness**

The previous section was an attempt to locate white urban ministry structures and practices within 1) the broader geographic and economic phenomena of gentrification, and 2) theological and cultural narratives which motivate those practices. Even those dynamics, however, operate within a paradigm which is both more expansive in United States society and more deeply integrated into the psyche of the culture—the sociopolitical reality of white supremacy. Given the extent that gentrification disproportionately displaces people of color, and the difficulties experienced by urban ministry practitioners in forming genuine interracial community, it is crucial to explore the ways in which urban ministry practices reflect what philosopher George Yancy calls "the social ontology of whiteness."[80]

This chapter will begin with an analysis of what "whiteness" is, employing concepts drawn from the field of critical whiteness studies. I will then focus on how whiteness manifests itself geographically, elaborating on Shannon Sullivan's concept of "ontological expansiveness." Drawing upon Willie James Jennings's argument that white colonialism initiated a process of severing the link between identity and place, I will argue that this dislocation from place characterizes white experience and behavior—both in a sense of rootlessness which motivates relocation into diverse urban cores; and a disconnectedness to place which generates a sense of entitlement to relocation and an

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[80] George Yancy, "Introduction: Fragments of a Social Ontology of Whiteness," in *What White Looks Like: African-American Philosophers on the Whiteness Question*, ed. George Yancy (New York: Routledge, 2004), 33, Google Play ebook.

inadequate recognition of the place-making of original communities. Finally, I will examine selected writings and common practices of urban ministry practitioners as case studies, examining them for attitudes and assumptions that exemplify underlying patterns of whiteness in their understanding and approach to place.

## "What White Looks Like": Critical Whiteness Studies

Recent decades have seen a growth in scholarship dedicated to understanding how white identity is constructed within a political and economic context of white supremacy, and how it performs to reinforce unjust social structures. This scholarship is generally classified under the category of "critical whiteness studies," and it is performed within a variety of disciplines including history, sociology, literature, and philosophy.[81] While most work in this area has arisen the previous two decades, several critical whiteness scholars cite W. E. B. Du Bois as an early pioneer, particularly his challenging essay, "The Souls of White Folk." Here Du Bois claims a deep understanding of white psychology from his vantage point suffering under racial oppression:

> I see these souls undressed and from the back and side…. I know their thoughts and they know that I know…. They deny my right to live and be and call me

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[81] For two early studies under the "critical whiteness" rubric see historian David Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (New York: Verso, 1991); and Toni Morrison's work of literary criticism *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992). For sociological works on whiteness drawing on qualitative research see Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, *Racism without Racists: Color-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in the United States* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003); and Korie Edwards, *The Elusive Dream: The Power of Race in Interracial Churches* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008). For recent philosophical works see Sullivan, *Revealing Whiteness*, and George Yancy, *Look, a White! Philosophical Essays on Whiteness* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2012).

> misbirth!… And yet as they preach and strut and shout and threaten, crouching as they clutch at rags of facts and fancies to hide their nakedness, they go twisting, flying by my tired eyes and I see them ever stripped,—ugly, human.[82]

Du Bois's strong language encapsulates the predominant interests in critical whiteness studies—a programmatic examination of white modes of thinking and being within the context of white oppression, uncovering white habits, behaviors and attitudes which contribute to that oppression, and an interrogation of society's inherent privileging of white people as the normative standard for what is noble and reasonable.

A word about nomenclature—the literature frequently uses the terms *white supremacy*, *white privilege*, and *whiteness*; sometimes interchangeably, but often with different emphases and nuances. *White privilege* has gained the most currency in public debate, due to its popularization by Peggy McIntosh in her article "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack," in which she defines it as "unearned race advantage and conferred dominance."[83] The term primarily emphasizes the structural advantages enjoyed by white people in a white-dominated society irrespective of individual intentions or specific discriminatory actions. Shannon Sullivan distinguishes the term *white supremacy* from white privilege as "conscious, deliberate forms of white

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[82] W. E. B. Du Bois, "The Souls of White Folk," in *Darkwater, Voices from Within the Veil* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 15.

[83] Peggy McIntosh, "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack," *Peace and Freedom* (July/August 1989): 11.

domination,"[84] while Charles W. Mills argues that this term ought to denote the entire

global system of white dominance.[85]

The term *whiteness*, on the other hand, emphasizes the way white hegemonic

social structures act to shape white people's sense of identity and framing of the world,

including the defining of people of color as "other." As George Yancy explains:

> Whiteness embodies a difference that indeed makes a difference on the minds and
> bodies of both whites and nonwhites. Whiteness's reality gets concretized through
> complex systems of advantage that have accrued over time, systems of differential
> power (whites benefiting more than nonwhites) created and maintained by whites
> who see it as their natural (God-given) right to be at the apex of natural and
> historical evolution.[86]

I will generally use *white supremacy* interchangeably with *white hegemony* to reference

the global socio-economic system (favoring Mills's use over Sullivan), and *white*

*privilege* to refer specifically to the resultant advantages for white people on the

individual level. But it is Yancy's account of a fundamental "reality," which "gets

concretized through complex systems of advantage that have accrued over time," which

is the primary focus of this thesis. *Whiteness* is the comprehensive physical, spatial, and

psychic matrix that both shapes and is shaped by white people and systems of oppression.

Growing up white in a world structured on the pre-eminence of whiteness generates a

worldview and habitual attitudes and behaviors so ingrained as to remain largely

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[84] Sullivan, 5.

[85] Charles W. Mills, "Racial Exploitation and the Wages of Whiteness," in Yancy, *What White Looks Like*, 55, Google Play eBook.

[86] Yancy, "Introduction," 34.

unconscious. Yet as the example of gentrification demonstrates, these behaviors (such as

renting out newly refurbished properties in previously disinvested neighborhoods) and

attitudes (such as seeing oneself as a "pioneer" moving into a "crime-ridden

neighborhood") have very tangible effects on people of color, who bear the brunt of

living in a a racialized society.

*Invisible Whiteness*

One widespread narrative about racial justice in the United States maintains that

our society has largely transcended its racist past, since Martin Luther King, Jr. delivered

his famous "I Have a Dream" speech at the Lincoln Memorial and Congress subsequently

passed the Civil Rights Act of 1964. This narrative has been successfully exposed as false

in ensuing decades with analysis demonstrating persistent inequities between white

people and people of color with regard to total wealth, educational opportunity,

employment opportunity, and treatment within the criminal justice system.[87] However,

according to Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, despite the evidence many "whites rationalize

minorities' contemporary status as the product of market dynamics, naturally occurring

phenomena, and blacks' imputed cultural limitations."[88] Racial inequality is ascribed not

to discriminatory social policies and patterns but to other "natural" factors with no

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[87] For a discussion of wealth inequality see Strand, "Inheriting Inequality." For analysis of the racialized criminal justice system see Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (New York, NY: The New Press, 2012).

[88] Bonilla-Silva, 2.

malicious racist intent. Bonilla-Silva illustrates the gap between white perception and

reality regarding prevalent residential segregation:

> Despite whites' beliefs that residential and school segregation, friendship, and
> attraction are natural and raceless occurrences, social scientists have documented
> how racial considerations affect all these issues. For example, residential
> segregation is created by white buyers searching for white neighborhoods and
> aided by realtors, bankers, and sellers. As white neighborhoods develop, white
> schools follow—an outcome that further contributes to the process of racial
> isolation.[89]

While most contemporary whites would likely not consciously express a desire to

"search for white neighborhoods," the fact that most United States metropolitan areas

remain largely segregated attests to wider behavioral patterns whether or not they are

specifically perceived or articulated as such. Even when the professed desire is to move

specifically to a racially diverse neighborhood, as Benesh expresses above, it is plausible

that other social and aesthetic neighborhood characteristics, derived from whiteness,

factor into the decision (as will be further discussed below). Korie Edwards, in her study

of interracial churches, describes this lack of awareness of racialized motivations as *white

transparency*. Edwards describes this as "a lack of racial consciousness. Whites are

unaware that their race has consequence for their lives….White transparency is in many

respects the most challenging dimension of whiteness in the sense that it is very difficult

to address a problem if the problem is not acknowledged."[90] This "indirect" form of

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[89] Ibid., 39.

[90] Edwards, 11.

racism, while less overt than the legally endorsed discrimination of decades past, is in

reality just as pernicious and more difficult to root out due to its prevalent disavowal.

*Whiteness as Habit*

Recently, a few critical whiteness scholars have analyzed the problem of

"indirect" racism through the lens of John Dewey's pragmatist philosophy and his

understanding of habits. Terrance MacMullan defines habits according to Dewey as

"acquired patterns of responding to and understanding an environment," and summarizes

their function:

> Habits form because they work; they become sedimented in a person's behavior
> because they enable him to find equilibrium within the surrounding environment.
> The longer that a habit functions, the less obvious it becomes. It becomes such a
> part of an individual organism that it becomes unnoticeable until a problem
> throws it into relief.[91]

Applying this framework to the issue of colonialism and race, MacMullan argues that the

theological and cultural categories which formed the early European colonists (including

racist 'taxonomies' of humankind) carried an interpretive weight which bestowed a

"*seeming naturalness and obviousness* [emphasis original]" to the notion of white

superiority.[92] These assumptions, backed up by military power, established hierarchical

and oppressive relationships between European colonists and people of color, which then

embedded in whites' intuitive responses to people of color over generations. "White

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[91] Terrance MacMullan, *Habits of Whiteness: A Pragmatist Reconstruction*
(Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2009), 76.

[92] Ibid., 74.

habits" persist to the present day, including "the habit of taking impulses of fear and uncertainty at dealing with unfamiliar people of different races and organizing them into habits of exclusion and control."[93]

Shannon Sullivan also grounds her understanding of systemic racism in a pragmatist framework, declaring, "White privilege is best understood as a constellation of psychical and somatic habits formed through transaction with a racist world."[94] Unlike MacMullan, however, she also incorporates psychoanalytic thought which understands whiteness not only as an entrenched pattern of responses to people of color but as an active psychological suppression of any awareness of privilege. For Sullivan, when habit is treated as completely non-conscious "what is lost is the notion that the ugliness of a habit can trigger forceful but evasive psychosomatic resistance to conscious examination of it."[95] Thus not only is whiteness characterized by an unreflective acceptance of the social order as normative, but also by psychological defenses activated by any challenging of that perspective. Practically speaking, this means that any attempt to name or confront whiteness will likely result in pain, defensiveness, and denial.

This psychological resistance can also paradoxically manifest itself in the kinds of strategies white people employ to challenge their own complicity in white supremacy.

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[93] Ibid., 63.

[94] Sullivan, 63.

[95] Sullivan, 9.

One of Sullivan' examples pertains specifically to the issue of gentrification, and

references Sullivan's concept of "ontological expansiveness" outlined above:

> When a white person makes a well-intentioned decision not to live in an all-white neighborhood, for example, doing so can simultaneously disrupt her habit of always interacting with white neighbors and augment her racial privilege by increasing her ontological expansiveness. The sheer fact that she is able to make a choice about which neighborhood in which she lives is, after all, an effect of the privilege she has because of her race and economic class. That privilege is only strengthened by attempts to change her environment.[96]

Sullivan acknowledges the paradoxical nature of this dynamic, but maintains that it

serves as a paradigmatic illustration of how well-meaning attempts to deconstruct or

minimize the effects of white supremacy can end up reinforcing that same structure.

Certainly the results of gentrification patterns described above bear out this analysis.

Whatever desires or intentions of preserving urban neighborhoods whites—including

urban ministry practitioners—may have, their actions continually result in the

displacement of people of color. This correlation leads to the question: are these patterns

completely coincidental, given that white intentions are rarely specifically to displace? Or

do the structural realities actually manifest deeper assumptions inculcated by white

privilege, however unconscious those factors may be? We now turn to examine more

specifically how "habits of whiteness" relate to people's relationship to place.

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[96] Ibid., 10.

## "Where Do You Want to Go?": Whiteness and Place

In *Racism without Racists*, Bonilla-Silva posits that many habits of whiteness develop as a result of most white people growing up in racially segregated space, where their sense of their own identities and those of people of color are shaped in isolation from significant cross-racial relationships. Whites' "high levels of social and spatial segregation and isolation from minorities creates … a racialized, uninterrupted socialization process that *conditions* and *creates* whites' racial taste, perceptions, feelings, and emotions and their views on racial matters."[97] This conception owes a great deal to sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's concept of the *habitus*, in which patterns of behavior are unconsciously developed based upon the opportunities and constraints determined by one's social location and environment.[98] While Bonilla-Silva focuses on how this process "promotes a sense of [white] group belonging … and negative views about nonwhites,"[99] I propose that the social position and lived experience of whites in such environments also conditions their intuitions in relationship to place, an assumed ease of mobility into and out of places that reflects white social power and a level of ignorance of the historical and cultural makeup of the places they move into.

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[97] Bonilla-Silva, 104.

[98] See David Swartz, *Culture and Power: The Sociology of Pierre Bourdieu* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1997), 95-116.

[99] Bonilla-Silva, 104.

*The Ability to Do*

Critical whiteness scholar George Yancy is one who describes white identity as tied to spatiality. He describes an incident in which a three year old white girl declares that she does not want to nap next to a black girl, calling her a racial slur. Noting that this incident occurred in the 1990s, Yancy asserts that the girl, Carla, is "inhabiting, learning, performing, and perpetuating racial spatial logics … that have begun to feel like 'life as usual.'"[100] It is precisely the prospect of the black girl entering her "white space" which elicits her response, which is racist despite Carla's lack of cognitive understanding of the slur's significance. Yancy elaborates on the nature of the white spatial orientation:

> For Carla, this orientation is expansive and colonial; it gives her a sense of indefinite spatiality. She is always given the "right" and the "absolute freedom" to demarcate her white space and to ostracize those who don't "naturally" belong in it. Indeed, she comes to inhabit the world spatially in the mode of an "ability to do" or the "capacity to do."[101]

It is this deep sense of coming into the world "in the mode of an 'ability to do'" which has ramifications for how places are transformed when predominantly white people gentrify a neighborhood, including the tensions which arise between white newcomers and original non-white residents. For as Yancy explains, this expansive white orientation generates the inverse effect on people of color—for the black girl in question, she "will learn what it means to undergo social and psychological strangulation within white dominated spaces. She will come to experience what it means to be deemed a

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[100] Yancy, *Look, A White!*, 23.

[101] Ibid., 24.

problematic body, a suspicious body, a racially profiled body."[102] Disagreements between

white gentrifiers and original non-white residents do not occur on a level playing field

within the wider social reality of white hegemony.

Another scholar who frames questions of race in terms of its relationship to place

is Sara Ahmed, who in "A Phenomenology of Whiteness" analyzes white positionality in

terms of comfort: "To be comfortable is to be so at ease with one's environment that it is

hard to distinguish where one's body ends and the world begins. One fits, and by fitting

the surfaces of bodies disappears from view. White bodies are comfortable *as they inhabit*

*spaces that extend their shape* [emphasis original]."[103] What Ahmed appears to mean by

"extending their shape" is that a constellation of white cultural attitudes, subtle habits,

and modes of speaking and situating oneself in place all come to characterize an

institution (or a neighborhood) as a whole. Whiteness for Ahmed is an orientation which

makes certain life opportunities "within reach" more than others: "whiteness is an

orientation that puts certain things within reach. By objects, we would include not just

physical objects, but also styles, capacities, aspirations, techniques, habits. Race

becomes, in this model, a question of what is within reach, what is available to perceive

and to do 'things' with."[104] The reality of white supremacy therefore makes certain

aspirations or capacities more within reach for white people than others in terms of what

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[102] Ibid.

[103] Sara Ahmed, "A Phenomenology of Whiteness," *Feminist Theory* 8, no. 2 (August 2007), 158.

[104] Ibid., 154.

is understood or felt to be possible, which is in turn a function of what *is* structurally and politically possible resulting from white economic and political dominance.[105] As MacMullan starkly puts it, "Whiteness … perpetuates the myth that we can always change ourselves and the world to fit our fancy."[106]

*Place and Identity*

Another account of the relationship between race and place is offered by theologian Willie James Jennings, who in *The Christian Imagination* traces what he calls "[western] Christianity's diseased social imagination" to the onset of European colonialism.[107] Similarly to MacMullan, Jennings identifies distinct habits of thought and behavior formed in the catastrophic experience of colonialism, constituting a "deep theological architecture that patterned early modern visions of peoples, places, and societies." For Jennings, this "deep architecture" was characterized by a loss of humility and adaptability in the church's ability to relate across difference. "Indeed, it is as though Christianity, wherever it went in the modern colonies, inverted its sense of hospitality. It claimed to be the host, the owner of the spaces it entered, and demanded native peoples enter its cultural logics, its ways of being in the world, and its conceptualities." This presumption of dominance thwarted the potential for people of different ethnicities and

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[105] I owe the insight of the direct connection between felt capacity and actual, structural capacity to Zac Davis, personal conversation.

[106] MacMullan, 141.

[107] Willie James Jennings, *The Christian Imagination: Theology and the Origins of Race* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010), 6.

cultures to experience Christianity as a faith "that understands its own deep wisdom and

power of joining, mixing, merging, and being changed by multiple ways of life,"

replacing it with a need to absorb racial and cultural difference into a pre-existing social

and theoretical framework based on whiteness, and resulting in the centuries-long

patterns of violence and white hegemony familiar to us today.[108]

The pivotal turn in Christianity's social imagination was the severance of people

from their place of origin (as Europeans left their lands, and forcibly enslaved and

removed Africans from theirs) and the concomitant establishment of scales of racial

identity and hierarchy, organized with white Europeans at the center and pinnacle.[109] For

Jennings, the correlation between these two phenomena is not accidental. With

colonialism, place loses its fundamental role in shaping human identity. To illustrate just

what was lost, Jennings cites Keith H. Basso's ethnographic work among the Western

Apache people, for whom:

> specific spatial reality is the hermeneutical horizon on which they see themselves
> and the world. The Apache practice of naming places carries with it a
> constellation of identity markers. Fundamentally, place-names are the means
> through which Apache tell their history. As Basso states, "What matters most to
> Apaches is where events occurred, not when, and what they serve to reveal about
> the development and character of Apache social life."[110]

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[108] Ibid., 8-9.

[109] Jennings, 33-37.

[110] Ibid., 54.

The arrival of the colonial powers and their unrestrained violent reshaping of social and geographic space disrupted this intimate connection to land, and along with it, the role of place as a source of communal wisdom and foundational constituent of identity.

In the ensuing vacuum, Europeans replaced this relationship with race—generating a new identity signifier centered on their own appearance and ways of being. "Europeans enacted racial agency as a theologically articulated way of understanding their bodies in relation to new spaces and new peoples and to their new power over those spaces and people."[111] Separated from their own land by an ocean, and faced with landscapes, peoples, and customs so unfamiliar to their own, European colonizers turned to a concept of race as a means of understanding who they were in relation to others. Jennings stresses that this move was not necessarily consciously controlled, but was in a sense forced upon them by their own actions. "It is discursive practice," he writes, "but one that presented itself as the only real option given the aggressive desacralization of the world. When you disrupt and destroy the delicate and contingent connection of people's identities bound to specific lands you leave no alternative but racial agency."[112] For Jennings, then, the racialization of human identities is directly tied to a process of disconnecting those identities from place.

The contemporary consequences of this dislocated-ness for how white people understand themselves in relation to place is addressed by geographers Owen J. Dwyer

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[111] Ibid., 58.

[112] Ibid.

and John Paul Jones III in their article, "White Socio-Spatial Epistemology." They

describe the social construction of whiteness as reliant upon "an essentialist and non-

relational understanding of identity. Whiteness offers subjects who can claim it an

opportunity to ignore the constitutive process by which all identities are constructed."[113]

Instead of understanding identity as formed and shaped by a particular place, whiteness

"operates non-relationally, with space understood as being comprised of discrete and

bounded objects and spatio-temporal units that can be readily delineated, known and

assigned 'attributes.'"[114] This rather mechanical approach to understanding place is

manifested in the structures and patterns white people employ to inhabit it:

> In its solidification, [white spatial epistemology] underwrites private property and
> the construction and orderly maintenance of segmented social space, from gated
> communities to redlined districts, from nature 'preserves' (including, for example,
> all-white golf courses) to office towers (white by day, brown and black by
> night).[115]

It is not difficult to see in this description a picture of the postsuburban landscape

decried by many of the white urban ministry practitioners in the previous chapter. The

social *milieu* in which most middle to upper class whites are raised is shaped by a basic

disconnection with land and the fragmented social existence described by Wilford.

However, in Dwyer and Jones's account white identity is shaped not only by this more

sterile experience of place but also by the perception of "different" places like non-white

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[113] Owen J. Dwyer and John Paul Jones III, "White Socio-Spatial Epistemology," *Social and Cultural Geography* 1, no. 2 (2000), 210.

[114] Ibid., 212.

[115] Ibid.

urban neighborhoods: "For, if [the] white suburb is to be maintained as 'safe', 'predictable' and 'orderly', then its socio-spatial complement must be epistemologically cordoned as the 'ghetto' and its putative inhabitants cast as 'menacing', 'volatile' and 'disorderly.'"[116] These stereotypical images have a tenacious hold on the white imagination, shaping white intuitive understanding of self and place and often existing simultaneously with genuine desires to integrate with urban communities, a dynamic which can generate contradictory patterns of engagement when white urban ministry practitioners attempt to inhabit diverse urban neighborhoods.

It is worth noting at this point that this disconnected pseudo-relationship to place described by Jennings and Dwyer and Jones is precisely what many urban ministry practitioners, particularly those invested in the "New Parish" movement, keenly feel and seek to amend through neighborhood-focused, holistic community. The authors of *The New Parish* refer to "living above place" as a problem endemic to modernity, "the tendency to develop structures that keep cause-and-effect relationships far apart in space and time where we cannot have firsthand experience of them."[117] They define their key term "parish" as "*all the relationships (including the land) where the local church lives out its faith together*. It is a unique word that recalls a geography large enough to live life together (live, work, play, etc.) and small enough to be known as a character within it

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[116] Ibid., 214.

[117] Soerens, Sparks, and Friesen, 24.

[emphasis original]."[118] The yearnings for "authentic" existence described previously also echo this desire for connectedness to a particular place, even if they do not express it in the language of academic theory. The desire for "rooting" implies an aspiration to undo the dislocation described by Jennings through intentional relational neighborhood integration. The locus of tension lies in the encounter between urban places already established with norms and preferences of communities of color, and white ministry practitioners searching for place while importing their own desires, images, and patterns for community—as well as the resources and power to enact those desires.

*The Ability to Go*

The possibility of these encounters even existing, in the context of gentrification, is a result of the economic and social power that white middle-class people possess to be courted by gentrifying neighborhoods, move in, afford property, and attract businesses catering to their tastes. This white social privilege—which generates a certain ease and confidence in the ability to enter other places, whether for traveling for a brief period or making a permanent move—is the "ontological expansiveness" described by Shannon Sullivan. Dwyer and Jones use the example of a print MasterCard advertisement to illustrate this tendency. It depicts two young white men driving a convertible down an empty stretch of highway:

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[118]Ibid., 23.

Set against the backdrop of the star-encrusted sky and open road, one of them says, 'Where do you want to go?', to which the other replies, 'I don't know, where do you want to go?' The caption across the bottom of the page reads: 'MasterCard. Accepted wherever you end up.'[119]

Dwyer and Jones note that this idyllic (from a white perspective) scene "stands in marked contrast to the experience of black travelers for whom travel is often a dangerous undertaking, fraught with uncertainty and the uneasy knowledge that one may *not* be 'accepted wherever you end up.'"[120] Certainly the widespread practice of racial profiling experienced by black drivers offers a counter-narrative to the one created in the advertisement—the carefree access to different kinds of places is not equally available to everyone.

While the endeavor to relocate and engage in ministry in a diverse urban neighborhood is a more extensive undertaking than travel and tourism, white privilege similarly factors into generating the ability of urban ministry practitioners to contemplate such a move in the first place. Even when the motivation for relocation may include learning more about racial justice issues, or attempting to deconstruct one's white privilege by rooting in place with people of color, such actions can manifest the very privilege they are trying to counteract. In the first place, if ministry practitioners enter a new place assuming they can form community by employing ministry structures familiar from their previous contexts, they will demonstrate a lack of regard and an unwillingness to learn from and adjust to local forms and customs. Moreover, the ease with which white

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[119] Dwyer and Jones III, 216.

[120] Ibid.

people can enter new places does not automatically entail ease in relationship building or

earn the trust of original residents. Any expectations along these lines can easily

communicate a lack of humility, an assumption that relocation should be as natural and

free of social friction as moving within their original social context. As Sullivan explains,

the desire of white people to move into a predominantly non-white space

> is merely another example of white people's assumption that any and all spaces,
> whether geographical/physical or rhetorical/cultural, are open for white people to
> legitimately move about in. To see black and other non-white spaces as places for
> white people to decide they may properly inhabit is to appropriate those places in
> a gesture that is much closer to colonialism than one of respect.[121]

The irony in the case of gentrification is that in attempting to undo the dissociation from

place that colonialism brought about, white gentrifiers are in a very real sense simply

reproducing colonial tendencies by acting according to their own interests based on the

assumptions and images generated in contexts dominated by whiteness. This can result in

counterproductive assumptions and patterns in ministry, to which we will now turn.

### The Contradictions of Whiteness: Examples from Urban Ministry

In this final section I will examine the discourse of urban ministry practitioners to

determine if patterns of thought can be understood to express characteristics of whiteness.

First, I will take a second look at the motivations expressed by urban church planters for

moving into central urban neighborhoods. In the previous chapter Benesh explains the

appeal of urban neighborhoods in terms of a desire to "carve out a sense of identity" and

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[121] Sullivan, 160.

"cultivate a deeper sense of place." The racial diversity and older aesthetics in these

neighborhoods are also cited as attractive. However, Brandon Rhodes, an urban ministry

worker in a lower-income "non-gentrified" Portland neighborhood, explains that most

neighborhoods experiencing new urban church plants have been undergoing

gentrification for decades, to the point that their character and aesthetic feels close

enough to white notions of what is comfortable:

> Only in the past decade or so has it become fashionable and culturally safe for
> planting-savvy denominations and networks to again return to the city, and thus to
> areas primed for gentrification…. Neighborhoods, I suggest, which have only
> recently been re-legitimized for middle class and suburban Christians. The recent
> evangelical rapprochement with the city, then, coincides with the recent re-
> building and de-coloring of the city. It's a sort of white-flight in reverse.[122]

Rhodes's assessment begs the question of exactly what quality of life these new urban

church plants are actually seeking, if the majority only enter after a certain amount of "re-

legitimizing" and "de-coloring" has taken place. While the ostensible desire is to cultivate

a sense of place relatively untainted by suburban isolation, Rhodes's account implies that

white instincts for place-making persist and are just as operative in the actual decision-

making process.

But many urban church planters, like the fictional "Darren" in the first chapter, do

desire to reach out and relate with original populations of color in their newly adopted

neighborhoods. Perhaps they originally began church plants geared toward the "creative

class" and had an epiphany once coming to awareness of the actual demographics and

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[122] Brandon Rhodes, "Churches without Roots are Not Plants: Springwater Community and Parish Collective," in Benesh, 204.

history of their neighborhood, or perhaps they had hopes for multi-racial fellowship from the beginning. Even in such cases, the intuitive expectations of how such community should form is often based upon white perspectives and inadequate understanding of alternate forms of place-making. In the following passage, Benesh expresses consternation at some practices of historical black churches displaced by gentrification:

> One of the troubling elements revealed in the article "By the Grace of God," quoted earlier was that rather than changing with the neighborhood, the African-American church the author mentioned brings in for Sunday worship its diaspora from twenty to thirty miles away. A van driver literally drives one hundred miles to pick up black congregants from all over the city….
>
> As many inner cities became degraded beginning in the 1950s through to the 1990s many ethnic whites fled the city. Like the church mentioned in the article, many would come back into the city to worship with other ethnic whites. This is problematic on both fronts. As followers of Jesus we're neither slave nor free, black nor white, but on an equal footing before the cross of Christ. Missiologically speaking, aren't we to adapt to the changing nature of the city?[123]

In this fascinating and disturbing passage, Benesh draws a comparison between the practices of "white flight" churches in previous decades to the efforts of historical black churches to hold on to their communities in the wake of widespread displacement. This betrays a lack of historical consciousness on two fronts. First, the flight of white populations from the urban core resulted from their own agency and desire to separate themselves from growing populations of people of color, while black dislocation from these same neighborhoods was not their own choice, but rather a consequence of gentrification and increased property costs due to renewed white interest in these places.

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[123] Benesh, 137.

The crucial disparities in economic power and underlying motivations for leaving the urban core in the first place are blurred in this account.

Second, Benesh's complaint that black churches are not "changing with the neighborhood" shows an insufficient understanding of the historical role of the black church as a source of cultural and communal strength in the face of the wider reality of white supremacy. Such spaces are necessary for black survival in the context of gentrification, as more and more public spaces become "redeveloped" in accordance with white cultural and aesthetic tastes. Stephen Nathan Haymes explains this dynamic in his book, *Race, Culture, and the City*:

> Even as the provision of 'public' space by redevelopment projects is dubbed as a triumph for the public, the deterritorialization of black residents destroys the very material basis of their public life. The threat to black public space has to be linked to the withdrawal of physical space from which blacks can organize their experience into a politics and culture of resistance.[124]

By attempting to draw an equivalence between black churches busing in congregants who have been displaced, and white churches drawing in suburban residents who left the city of their own accord with significant resources, Benesh exemplifies the "white habit" of interpreting the practices of people from different social locations according to the values of whiteness, even as he attempts to establish theological grounds for church adaptation to changing community dynamics. The problem lies in the very attempt to establish such common ground from the vantage point of whiteness.

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[124] Stephen Nathan Haymes, *Race, Culture, and the City: A Pedagogy for Black Urban Struggle* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1995), 107.

A final example of how patterns or habits of whiteness can influence urban ministry is found in some of the beliefs expressed by Bob Lupton and others in the "necessity" and "benefits" of gentrification. It is not within the scope of this thesis to make a definitive argument assessing the general social effects of a phenomenon as widespread and entrenched as gentrification. However, it is possible to scrutinize some of the arguments adduced in its defense for characteristically white assumptions about the nature of place. Most straightforward is Lupton's assertion that an economically thriving neighborhood *requires* some displacement of poorer residents and the importation of "home-owning, goal-driven, faith-motivated neighbors."[125] While Lupton's work to provide increased low-income housing demonstrates a genuine commitment to long-term residents, his comments on gentrification reflect an almost cavalier attitude toward some poorer residents when he declares, "Over-crowded tenements and flop houses should be thinned out or cleaned up, and this inevitably means displacement of some of the vulnerable along with their predators."[126]

Benesh offers a more qualified version of the same argument when he asks:

if [gentrification] is a catalyst to stabilize the neighborhood to make it safer, which in turn brings in more investment , is it always wrong? While many decry gentrification as a great social evil, we need to be honest and say that there is nothing glamorous or wholesome about urban neighborhoods that are war zones and pockets of social unrest.[127]

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[125] Lupton, "Gentrification with Justice."

[126] Ibid.

[127] Benesh, 126.

Few would disagree that crime reduction in any given neighborhood would be a positive

development. However, while Benesh does extensively discuss the realities of

displacement due to gentrification, he nevertheless uses language which, like Lupton's,

paints a picture in rather broad strokes of a neighborhood which fits media stereotypes of

"the ghetto," which is most frequently associated with people of color in the dominant

social imagination. In making his own argument about place, Haymes critiques social

scientists Douglas Massey and Nancy Denton, who

> argue that black residential segregation has resulted in an "autonomous cultural
> system". They claim that it is a cultural system that devalues work, marriage, and
> family formation but promotes male joblessness, teenage motherhood, single
> parenthood, alcoholism, drug abuse, crime, violence, and school failure.
> According to Massey and Denton, it is "black street culture" … that has produced
> America's huge black "urban underclass." Their solution is a dismantling of the
> "ghetto."[128]

Neither Lupton nor Benesh engage in direct racial stereotyping in any of their

comments. However, I believe it is inherently problematic to adopt narrative frames of

urban neighborhoods as crime ridden, or "war zones," because as Dwyer and Jones

remind us, these default images of urban neighborhoods have been constructed habitually

over time to establish the identity of white places as safe and orderly. And if the

descriptions used by urban ministry practitioners are employed in part as apologetics for

gentrification patterns that ultimately benefit mostly white people, then the language and

the assumptions merit interrogation.

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[128] Haymes, 7-8.

We have seen, therefore, that even the best intentioned white urban ministry models are still likely to manifest certain habits of whiteness, if for no other reason than the perspectives generated in predominantly white spaces are ubiquitous and powerful within the culture as a whole. In the following chapter, we will take a step even deeper into the human psyche, to explore whether habits of whiteness can be understood as integral to the development of the unconscious. I will propose that the establishment of social patterns and habits in the psyche is one crucial way in which they persist and reproduce themselves through generations, and that the reason why whiteness is so difficult to confront and root out is the extent to which it is interwoven into the psychological development of all who are raised in a society shaped by it.

## **Part IV. Developmental Psychology and White Relationship to Place**

The goal of this thesis is to examine prevalent patterns in urban ministry models which work against economically just, interracial community formation. In analyzing these models, I have proceeded on a trajectory moving from the most immediate, conscious motivations and strategies of urban ministry practitioners into deeper assumptions and broader social structures and arrangements. The previous chapter addressed the social construct of whiteness as a matrix of underlying attitudes and behavioral patterns which sustain a white dominated social order. What further interests me is the way in which the social interacts with the individual at the level of psychological development—how attitudes and patterns of whiteness are instilled into people from the earliest ages so that they do not consciously register as oppressive, but feel normative. If most white people, including urban ministry practitioners, operate out of "habits of whiteness" as Sullivan and MacMullan describe, how do those habits form?

I would be remiss at this point not to acknowledge a substantial body of work which specifically addresses the psychological development of racial identity. This scholarship focuses on how white people and people of color understand themselves in relationship to their socially constructed racial group, and the privileges and advantages (or lack thereof) conferred by the social order. For example, Janet E. Helms examines the "maturation process of recognition and abandonment of white privilege" in terms of *racial identity statuses*, ranging from complete obliviousness to racism to an active commitment to resisting participation in racist structures. She also describes an analogous

process for people of color overcoming internalized racism.[129] This model is vitally

important, particularly as it is used to help facilitate the transformation of identities

shaped by racialization. My own interests, however, center more on how such racialized

identities are formed in the first place at the most intuitive levels, making the process of

transformation so inherently difficult. Hence my focus on psychoanalytic theories of

childhood development.

The central argument of this chapter is that predominantly white, middle class

environments constructed through centuries of white supremacy interact with the early

development of the unconscious, so that white intuitive relationship to place reflects the

ontological expansiveness described by Sullivan. I begin with Sullivan's own account of

how the unconscious is formed, which draws heavily on the metaphor of "seduction"

employed by French psychoanalytic theorist Jean Laplanche. I then turn to Heinz Kohut's

notion of cultural selfobjects and their role in the development the grandiose self,

followed by womanist theologian and psychoanalyst Phillis Sheppard's critique and

development of those theories. I believe the sense of dis-locatedness described by several

urban ministry practitioners results in both an inability to perceive the deep place-

relationships experienced by original residents of gentrifying neighborhoods, and an

innately felt legitimacy in inhabiting such places according to imported cultural norms.

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[129] Janet E. Helms, "An Update of Helms's White and People of Color Racial Identity Models," in *Handbook of Multicultural Counseling*, 1st ed., edited by J.G. Ponterotto, et. al. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1995), 188. See also Beverly Daniel Tatum, *"Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?" And Other Conversations About Race* (New York: Basic Books, 2003), who cites Helms's model and expands upon it.

The fact that such behaviors can operate in tandem with honestly articulated desires for place-integrated community simply attests to their unconscious, deeply rooted nature, and the extent to which social environment shapes psychological development.

### The Seduction of the Unconscious: Sullivan and Laplanche

As discussed above, Shannon Sullivan understands habit to function primarily as "unconscious: seemingly invisible, even nonexistent, and actively resisting conscious efforts to know it."[130] However, it is important for Sullivan that the unconscious nature of whiteness not be mistaken for an innately human trait, operating completely independently of the social environment. She therefore follows John Dewey in critiquing Sigmund Freud's classic understanding of the unconscious as too "atomistic," in that it posits "an original individual psyche, one that is not formed in transactional relationship with the broader world."[131] For Sullivan, an account of psychic development cordoned off from the outside world is insufficient to account for the formation of habits, and moreover has disturbing implications for any account of whiteness and racism:

> thinking the unconscious as initially and primarily formed in relative isolation from its … environments risks the dangerous conclusion that the psychical operations of racism have not been internalized through processes of transaction with a racist world, but rather are innately present in the human unconsciousness. This approach to racism effectively declares at the outset that attempts to

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[130] Sullivan, 63.

[131] Ibid., 46.

eradicate white privilege are doomed to failure: the world necessarily is and will always be racist because the human beings who inhabit it are irrevocably racist.[132]

To help resolve this dilemma Sullivan turns to Jean Laplanche, whose "theory of seduction presents the unconscious as initially and continually formed in relationship with concrete others in a sociopolitical world."[133] Laplanche's theory is in many ways a modification of Freud's ideas about the development of infant sexuality. However, as Sullivan notes, the theory is not referring to "seduction" in any literal sense of a sexually abusive act between parent and infant. Instead, Laplanche asserts that "I am, then, using the term *primal seduction* [emphasis original] to describe a fundamental situation in which an adult proffers to a child verbal, non-verbal and even behavioural signifiers which are pregnant with unconscious sexual significations."[134] Through verbal and nonverbal communication, the parent conveys unconscious messages about sexuality which, for the most part, the child is unable to understand. As Sullivan explains, "in seduction, an adult draws an infant into the adult world in an irresistible fashion, captivating the child in ways that he or she does not know how to respond to."[135]

Sullivan then expands this notion to include a myriad of subtle cues and signals that parents communicate, often themselves unconsciously, about people, events and places in the world. Whether responding to a potential threat, a welcome piece of news,

[132] Sullivan, 47.

[133] Ibid., 64.

[134] Jean Laplanche, *New Foundations for Psychoanalysis,* trans. David Macey (Cambridge, MA: Basil Blackwell Ltd., 1989), 126.

[135] Sullivan, 65.

or a person perceived as "different," parents present to their children "an adult world full of unintended bodily gestures and tones that communicates a great deal of enigmatic meaning to the children in it."[136] And given the nature of the racialized world we live in, some of this enigmatic meaning will be ascribed to race, because a "world that privileges whiteness helps produce a child's unconscious habits that also privilege whiteness by sending the child messages about race that often are opaque to both child and adult alike."[137] One example Sullivan uses is her own reaction to the smell of cumin, which she admits to associating "with the (perceived) body odor of Mexicans," (as her community referred to all Latino/a Americans). "Even though I now consciously know that the association is racist and I sincerely do not want to make it, I am not able to smell cumin without it occurring."[138] It is important to stress that Sullivan does not believe that the unconscious nature of these habits and responses *excuses* them, or mitigates their inherently racist nature and effect. What is important is the depth of the phenomena we have to reckon with—the ability of racist instinctive patterns of whiteness to coexist with earnest intentions to dismantle them.

As Sullivan's personal example shows, these habitual, unconscious responses are very often associated with physical characteristics of people of color—real or perceived —whether skin color, speech patterns, or styles of dress. Indeed, several quantitative

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[136] Ibid.

[137] Ibid., 71.

[138] Ibid., 68.

psychological studies demonstrate the pervasiveness of unconscious bias based on race.[139] In the previous chapter we saw how even those urban ministry practitioners who study issues of structural racism can use shorthand descriptions of urban neighborhoods like "war zones." In addition to shaping attitudes about people of color directly, however, the development of unconscious habit can extend to all aspects of life—for example, constructing and relating to social spaces like neighborhoods in the manner described by Dwyer and Jones III in the previous chapter. If Sullivan is correct and even late childhood and adulthood are characterized by "additional moments of seduction that continue the initial formation of the unconscious,"[140] then it seems likely that all manner of unconscious habits can be shaped by not only our relationships to caregivers or family members but also by the places where we are raised. This would include cultural practices, habitual ways of relating to personal space, and the very facility with which middle- to upper-class whites can travel to a wide variety of places without facing significant discomfort.

These kinds of unconscious habits in turn determine the ways in which white people relate to one another, form institutions, and construct policies that shape natural and social places in particular ways, which inevitably determine much about how people

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[139] For one example see David M. Amiodo and Patricia G. Devine, "Stereotyping and Evaluation in Implicit Race Bias: Evidence for Independent Constructs and Unique Effects of Behavior," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 91, no. 4 (2006): 652-661.

[140] Sullivan, 88. This is a point where Sullivan parts company with Laplanche, who maintained that the process of the seduction of the unconsciousness ended after early childhood.

of other races and cultures live due to the dominant position of whites in society. As

Sullivan writes:

> Unconscious habits have powerful "external" effects. They help create the
> material, economic, social, political, psychical, and cultural world in which
> people live (just as it, in turn, helps create unconscious habits). Nowhere is this
> truer than in the case of racism and white privilege. Human beings historically
> have lived and currently live in a raced and racist world in significant part because
> of unconscious investments in and productions of that world.[141]

What is important to understand is that it is not only habits that would generally be

considered "bad" that produce a raced and racist world (i.e. racial stereotypes, patterns of

segregated living), but can just as easily be instinctual patterns of behavior that are

generally lauded in the dominant culture. Sullivan cites the example of French

phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty, who "describes lived existence in terms of

projective intentionality, in which one projects meaning onto the world rather than

receives it as a ready-made given."[142] She points out, however, that positing such a stance

as the normal mode of human existence is highly problematic from an antiracist

perspective, because it "tends to suggest that it is desirable that all people live in as

ontologically an expansive manner as possible…. It implicitly encourages [white people]

not to concern themselves with other people's lived existence, including the ways in

which other people's existence is inhibited by white people and institutions."[143] The very

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[141] Sullivan, 88-89.

[142] Ibid., 163. Here Sullivan cites Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (New York: Routledge, 1962), 110-112.

[143] Ibid.

characteristics which Western culture extols as indicative of a healthy sense of self can also generate colonial patterns of behavior on a wide scale.

While Merleau-Ponty's views would certainly bolster and validate the sense of ontological expansiveness that drives social patterns like gentrification and some aspects of urban ministry models, these habitual modes of relating to place do not require articulation by revered intellectuals in order to function. The dynamics of unconscious social habit formation do that work effectively. Moreover, I suggest that such ontologically expansive habits actually derive from legitimate psychological needs which are pushed in racialized, oppressive directions through a social context shaped by whiteness, and then in turn reinforce white supremacist social structures. The legitimate need to live actively and confidently in the world takes on a dominating, expansionist character when that impulse is developed in a context without appropriate restraints— namely, within the context of white privilege. In order to explicate this further I turn to the self psychology of Heinz Kohut and his understanding of the development of the grandiose self.

**The Development of Grandiosity and the Selfobject: Heinz Kohut**

*Understanding Narcissism and Grandiosity*

Heinz Kohut, born in Vienna and emigrated to Chicago in 1940, is known primarily for the development of self psychology which, in the words of Phillis Sheppard, "is based on the premise that early caregivers' empathetic responses to the child's needs

lead to the development of a cohesive self whereby one has a sense of self continuity and coherence over time."[144] Similarly to Laplanche, Kohut developed many of his theories in conversation with Freudian psychoanalytic theory, and like Laplanche he diverges from Freud in that he "acknowledges the influence of the environment on the formation of psychic structure."[145] Whereas Freud understood the psyche primarily in terms of basic sexual and aggressive drives that experienced frustration in conflict with the external world's failure to satisfy them, Kohut "stressed innate developmental needs that we turn to others to meet."[146]

One developmental structure that occupied a great deal of Kohut's thinking was narcissism. While the contemporary understanding of narcissism tends to identify it as inherently pathological, with popular usage basically referring to anyone deemed excessively self-centered, Kohut understood narcissism as "a normal developmental phenomenon" which, if developed in a healthy direction, "moves toward consolidation of a cohesive self-structure, providing a sense of identity, value, meaning, and permanence and promoting the actualization of a person's potentialities (native talents and acquired skills)."[147] For Kohut, healthy development progressed along three primary axes:

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[144] Phillis Sheppard, *Self, Culture, and Others in Womanist Practical Theology* (New York, NY: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011), 113.

[145] Allen M. Siegel, *Heinz Kohut and the Psychology of the Self* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1996), 41.

[146] Sheppard, 111.

[147] Erez Banai, Mario Mikulincer, and Phillip R. Shaver, "'Selfobject' Needs in Kohut's Self Psychology: Links with Attachment, Self-Cohesion, Affect Regulation, and Adjustment," *Psychoanalytic Psychology* 22, no. 2 (2005), 225.

*grandiosity* (involving self-esteem, assertiveness, and accomplishment), *idealization* (developing strong goals and ideals), and *alter-ego connectedness* (involving the formation of intimate relationships and group ties).[148] For my purposes in examining patterns of whiteness and place I will be focusing on the grandiosity axis, as it directly involves the felt human capacities to "go" and to "do" addressed in the previous chapter.

According to psychoanalyst Allen M. Siegel, Kohut "postulates that the narcissistic experience begins with the infant's blissful state, which is inevitably upset by the expectable failure of its mother's ministrations."[149] The infant then engages in two parallel psychological processes to restore the original state of bliss: one in which caregivers are imbued with qualities of perfection and strength, which can be integrated through attachment to those figures—this Kohut called the 'idealized parent imago.'[150] The other developmental process involves an overvaluation of the self, which Kohut called the "narcissistic self," or later, the "grandiose self."—characterized by "a childhood system of grandiose fantasies that always seeks witness for the grandeur and perfection of the self by an important 'other,'" usually a parent.[151] As Kohut puts it in an interview given months before his death, "One needs to be accepted and mirrored—there

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[148] Ibid.

[149] Siegel, 60.

[150] Ibid.

[151] Ibid., 61.

has to be the gleam in some mother's eye which says it is good you are here and I acknowledge your being here and I am uplifted by your presence."[152]

Kohut focused on the developmental trajectory of the grandiose self, the health of which is directly dependent on the way caregivers respond to their child's grandiose desires and fantasies. "The most important source of a well functioning psychological structure, however, is the personality of the parents, specifically their ability to respond to the child's drive demands with non-hostile firmness and non-seductive affection."[153] If a caregiver responds to a child's grandiose fantasies with harshness or insecurity, this results in "the perpetuation of the grandiose self's archaic demands,"[154] leading to what is commonly understood as narcissistic personality disorder. On the other hand, if the parent is able to respond to the child with love and affirmation, then according to Siegel this results in a healthy self-confidence, appropriately constrained:

> Omnipotence, grandiosity and exhibitionistic narcissism are the features of the grandiose self…. When the demand for an echo to its feelings of expansiveness and unlimited power are responded to in a favorable way, the child eventually relinquishes its crude exhibitionistic demands and grandiose fantasies and accepts its real limitations. The noisy demands of the grandiose self become replaced with pleasure in realistic functioning and realistic self-esteem.[155]

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[152] Heinz Kohut, *Self Psychology and the Humanities: Reflections on a New Psychoanalytic Approach,* ed. Charles B. Strozier (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1985), 226.

[153] Heinz Kohut and Philip F. D. Seitz, "Concepts and Theories of Psychoanalysis," in *The Search for the Self*, vol. 1., ed. Paul Ornstein (New York: International Universities Press, 1978), 370-371.

[154] Siegel, 63.

[155] Ibid., 86.

*The Importance of the Selfobject, and Culture*

The key role which the parent plays in the trajectory of childhood development toward health or pathology is emphasized by Kohut in his use of the term "selfobject." As Siegel explains, this term describes how the young child experiences the primary caregivers, "in terms of the functions they perform and not in terms of their particular personal qualities. They are experienced by the child as part of the self. When they fulfill their functions they are taken for granted, as is a limb or any other body part. Only when an object fails in its functions does it draw notice."[156] As Phillis Sheppard notes, "It is the nature and tone of the relational dynamics between the self and its selfobjects in childhood that shape the self" and determine the degree of cohesion and health of the psyche.[157] Also noteworthy is Siegel's observation that the optimal, healthy trajectory of narcissism is experienced as standard, a matter of course—only a failure to affirm the child's grandiose fantasies in a secure, loving way is really noticed, calling attention to the caregiver's selfobject function.

In later years Kohut expanded his understanding of the selfobject to include culture, particularly significant cultural figures such as great artists, scholars, or religious leaders. Sheppard explains that in Kohut's thought "cultural imagoes may have a role in the celebration of the self that is integral to belonging, and that this experience may

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[156] Siegel, 71.

[157] Sheppard, 113-114.

function for the individual (and group) as a developmental step toward the formation of a

cohesive self…"[158] However, Sheppard proceeds to explain that cultural selfobjects ought

not to be understood as limited only to prominent individual figures:

> But, clearly, cultural selfobjects are not solely individuals. They are also the symbols, language, institutions, and cultural productions that meet those needs for individuals and groups that are sometimes embodied by individuals. In fact, the concepts of "self" and "cultural selfobject" are cultural productions. And, as cultural productions, the self and cultural selfobjects are unique to the context in which development, needs, and care occur.[159]

Sheppard's description of the nature of selfobjects invites us to view them not only in

terms of the individual relationship between parent and child but in a more holistic way,

emphasizing the relationship between the child and her broader cultural environment.

What this also implies is that the sense of confidence and felt capacity with which the

child engages the world is dependent to a large degree on the environment and life

situations which the child encounters—and this differs greatly dependent on social

context, and one's social position relative to white supremacy. It is this aspect of self

psychology which informs Sheppard's central critique of Kohut, to which we now turn.

**Sheppard's Womanist Critique of Kohut: The Role of Social Environment**

Sheppard writes both as a psychoanalytic theorist and as a womanist theologian, a

discipline characterized by how it makes "*black women's experience* the privileged

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[158] Sheppard, 114-115.

[159] Ibid., 115.

position for theology of, by, and about black women [emphasis original]."[160] This

prioritization of black women's experience constitutes not only a theological position but

a basic epistemological frame, which challenges the way knowledge has historically been

constructed primarily through the lens of white heteropatriarchy.[161] This frame enables

Sheppard to challenge Kohut on the grounds that as a white male operating in a white

Western intellectual environment, "his perspectives emerged out of a context where the

cultural myth of individualism, as the desired outcome of development, permeates the

theoretical air." Sheppard, in contrast, advocates for "an explicit shift in psychology

toward aspects of the social and contextual. The self becomes and is maintained, and

disrupted, in the relation sphere that is always situated in the sociocultural field."[162]

The implication of this for Sheppard's understanding of cultural selfobjects is

grounded in her observation that "Black women in the church and broader society know

all too well that regardless of where one is situated in terms of education and/or income,

there is, sooner or later, some experience that challenges one's sense of self."[163] The

cultural milieu under a patriarchal, white supremacist system does not reflect to black

women a sense of affirmation and acceptance of their capacities, regardless of the quality

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[160] Ibid., 1.

[161] For a full treatment of womanism as an epistemology see Stacey Floyd-Thomas, "Introduction: Writing for our Lives: Womanism as an Epistemological Revolution," in *Deeper Shades of Purple: Womanist Approaches in Religion and Society*, ed. Stacey Floyd-Thomas, 1-16 (New York: NYU Press, 2006).

[162] Sheppard, 115.

[163] Ibid., 117.

of relationship between parent and child. In fact, this cultural context in which black women grow and develop may constitute "a danger to the development of a healthy black female self," and necessitate a vigilant stance of "active intervention or interference by black mothers and fathers on behalf of their children."[164] This is a profoundly different mode of relating to the broader social environment, in terms of its potential selfobject function, than that experienced by white people (white men in particular), where it can be more or less taken for granted that the social context will encourage and nurture their internal sense of grandiosity. Sheppard therefore posits that the predominant models of how selfobjects function "have presumed privileged position for the developing child in the family and broader culture. These notions were not written with those not at the center of power in mind."[165] She offers this critique primarily in the interest of developing a self psychology directed toward the needs of black women, that provides "a sense of belonging that regards black women's individual and communal ways of being as normative." However, this project entails not simply an application of established theory to a neglected community, but a challenge to the theory itself: "it will advance a model of self-psychology that takes seriously black women's experiences—embodied, cultural, gendered, and sexual experiences—and, in so doing, make a claim to redefine the most foundational of self psychological concepts, the selfobject."[166]

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[164] Ibid., 119.

[165] Ibid., 120.

[166] Ibid., 122-123.

**White Cultural Grandiosity in Relationship to Place**

It is Sheppard's expansion of Kohut's cultural selfobject concept to include the wider social and cultural environment of psychological development which I find most helpful in understanding the intuitive relationship to place shaped by whiteness. While Sheppard emphasizes the effects which a white-dominated society inflicts upon black women's psychological development, I believe that her account also challenges us to question Kohut's (and Siegel's) unqualified positive evaluation of the "normal" narcissistic development of the self. This does not entail a complete repudiation of the need for affirmation, self-confidence, and a felt capacity to effect one's environment. However, just as Sullivan questioned the value of Merleau-Ponty's "projective intentionality," we ought to exercise caution in accepting a framing of narcissism like Siegel's:

> As I mentioned earlier, I believe that 'grandiose self' is an unfortunate name for this configuration because of its somewhat pejorative cast; 'expansive self' might have been a better term to describe the exhibitionistic narcissism of the grandiose self.[167]

While Siegel is not in conversation with Sullivan in addressing the nature of psychoanalytic theory, his "expansive self" echoes Sullivan's notion of "ontological expansiveness" in a way that is at least conceptually evocative. To the extent that caregivers, cultural products (artistic and intellectual), and cultural environments

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[167] Siegel, 66.

contribute to developing a sense of "expansiveness," it is worth questioning to what

degree that expansiveness assists or diminishes the flourishing of *all* people, particularly

in situations like gentrification where the expansiveness of some leads to the

displacement of others.

The passage from Siegel cited in the previous section[168] postulates that the healthy

development of grandiosity involves a gradual acceptance of "real limitations," and

results in the "noisy demands of the grandiose self" being replaced with "pleasure in

realistic functioning and realistic self-esteem." What requires interrogation, in light of

Sheppard's account of the importance of cultural context, and especially in light of the

realities of gentrification and displacement, is whether the dominant social position of

whites inculcates a degree of grandiosity which may *feel* "realistic" or appropriate within

white middle class environments but actually perpetuates harmful patterns regarding

mobility into and out of diverse socioeconomic contexts. To put it bluntly, who decides

how much grandiosity is healthy? To what extent is it based on the emotional experience

of the one engaging the world, and to what extent on the effects of their actions on

others? And how will the answers differ depending on which culture, which community,

is asking the questions?

If one's sociocultural milieu can be understood as having a selfobject function,

then intuitive understandings of place—the sense of security attached to place, the ease in

which different places are accessible or not, and the extent to which one's sense of self is

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[168] p. 86 above.

connected to neighborhood, or not—all develop on the unconscious level from the

earliest stages of life, and therefore likely shape attitudes and behavior even if different

understandings of place are adopted as one grows into adulthood. As Sheppard says,

"social contexts are deeply embedded in the psyche and the experiences of the body."[169]

In the predominantly white suburban context, this means that experiences of going on

vacation, or encountering racially and culturally diverse neighborhoods primarily on

television, or moving easily through spaces of wealth and power without incident or cues

of unwelcome, or even the experience of moving through neighborhoods which may feel

"threatening," but returning quickly to places of ease and security without being

significantly impacted—all of these shape the development of the grandiose self in

relationship to place, in varying degrees, in a way analogous to the development shaped

by the parental relationship.  The white middle class environment shapes underlying

instincts about place and generates expansive feelings to a degree that often does not

recognize the distinct cultural and economic formation of urban neighborhoods as

appropriate limits to one's capacity to relocate, or to import one's cultural norms into.

This account of the unconscious development of place-relationship can help us to

understand how patterns of white privilege and power can be enacted even by those who

make conscious efforts to learn and develop awareness about systemic racism and

gentrification. In some instances, this manifests itself simply as a lack of awareness of the

importance of place as a site of communal identity for original residents. This can be seen

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[169] Sheppard, 3.

in the example of urban church planters who desire to minister to diverse communities in

gentrifying neighborhoods, but do not fully take into account the extent that their very

presence contributes to forces disrupting the lives of those they want to enter into

relationship with. Or, they may reflexively assume that their own familiar structures or

cultural forms of worship are sufficient to the task of generating diverse community,

remaining perplexed when neighborhood residents of color prefer not to involve

themselves.

These patterns are also evident in Benesh's assessment, discussed in the previous

chapter, of the black church which sent vans to gather displaced members to worship in

their established neighborhood location. In addition to displaying an insufficient

historical analysis of the role of the black church, I suggest that his call for all residents to

"adapt to the changing nature of the city,"[170] evinces an intuitive comfort with the newer

characteristics of the neighborhood, and even a degree of comfort with the rate of change

itself. An easy acceptance that 'neighborhoods change' reflects a mode of relating to

place that is more likely to come out of a lived experience where high levels of

environmental change were more commonplace, which in turn results from the historical

ability asserted by white people to move into new environments and to reshape them

according to their cultural and economic needs. For many white church planters, the

changing face of the gentrifying neighborhood may pose challenges, but it is not

intuitively felt as a threat to a sense of identity in the way it might to original residents.

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[170] Benesh, 137.

Of course, these conclusions should not be construed as an attempt to psychoanalyze individual white urban ministry practitioners from a distance—my aim has been to ascertain whether some general patterns of thought and behavior can plausibly be attributed to whiteness through applying certain theoretical lenses. To a significant extent, my own thinking about grandiosity and intuitive understanding of place was first generated through my experience starting an intentional community in a gentrifying neighborhood in Seattle's Rainier Valley. Soon after my arrival I began attending an interracial church, and in an initial conversation with a white man in leadership who had lived there for decades, I was asked why I felt it necessary to move to a racially diverse neighborhood in order to pursue issues of racial justice. Perhaps it would be better for me to focus on the neighborhood where I moved from and "bloom where I was planted." While I did end up staying, and joining that church, I distinctly remember my feelings of surprise and indignation at the very suggestion that my decision to move into a diverse neighborhood was anything less than admirable, or that the missional community I helped form could be problematic for the neighborhood in any way.

Months later, I recall a conversation with a close friend from the neighborhood in which she asked me if I felt called to the Rainier Valley. I was very familiar with the Christian notion of perceiving a "call" to a certain place, but up to that point I had instinctively experienced that in terms of a certain project, or task—yes, I felt "called" to the Valley, to help lead our intentional community, to learn more about racial justice, and

engage in ministry that hopefully would be of some help to the residents of that neighborhood. But this is not what my friend was asking. She wanted to know if I felt called to the Valley *as a place*—a community with a distinct identity, history, and network of diverse cultures, which I had the opportunity to root in and learn from and identify myself with. I found it difficult to answer her, because before then I had not experienced neighborhood as a source of identity. I was experiencing the inheritance of the severance of the place/identity relationship described by Jennings a legacy of white supremacy and colonialism. In my perception the Rainier Valley was simply another location, like other neighborhoods I had lived in before, except it happened to have more people of color and more potential "need" for ministry than locations where I had lived in the past.

At that time I had still not come to the appreciation of rootedness in place articulated in *The New Parish* and by others in the missional community movement. That was something I gradually came to experience in my subsequent eight years in the Rainier Valley. My own "commitment to place" in a social context different from that in which I was raised required a willingness (always incomplete, always developing) to set aside what I felt I knew about inhabiting a neighborhood, and take my cues from the people I was growing in relationship with—people who challenged my implicit assumptions about how social structures worked, how community could be shaped, and what appropriate role a recently arrived white male could or should play in such a context. Mitigating my unconscious, deeply ingrained grandiosity in relationship to place

requires an ongoing commitment to de-centering my own experience, and my intuitive

sense of how the world is. The final chapter will further develop this stance of de-

centering within a theological framework.

## **Part V. De-Centering Whiteness in Urban Ministry**

In the preceding analysis of latent and overt whiteness in urban ministry

paradigms, I have attempted to offer an account of how social structures and individual

attitudes and behaviors influence and reinforce each other; creating a social reality of

white advantage which remains unacknowledged by many white people but which

nevertheless has harmful material effects on communities of color. Even when the

injustice of gentrification patterns *is* acknowledged by white urban ministry practitioners,

the ministry models employed generally fall short of confronting such systemic patterns

head-on. This perpetuates a state of affairs in which the reality of displacement is more or

less accepted while social justice efforts, to the extent that they are prioritized, largely

focus on mitigating the systemic effects on marginalized people within gentrifying

neighborhoods. Indeed, the ministry models discussed can, however unintentionally, reify

social patterns of white privilege, as the new gentrifying ministry communities constitute

the social and cultural center of community formation, out from which flow relational

and service efforts to original residents.

What are the possibilities of upending these patterns, of relating to place in a way

which truly honors long-term residents? The prospect is daunting, and taking a stance

which accepts the realities of gentrification and tries to work within them can feel like

simple realism. Given the pervasive power and wealth disparities in U.S. society, the

persistent overlap between race and class, and a housing market system which expedites

the desires of those with means and social status to locate where they desire—

gentrification patterns are not going anywhere anytime soon, and urban ministry organizations do not have the power to reverse them. The community development model of the FCA expends the most effort toward mitigating displacement through real estate activity, but even their efforts, as noted above, basically work within the gentrification paradigm.

Nevertheless, it seems to me still worthwhile to explore how underlying habits of whiteness might be disrupted and challenged more directly, so that urban ministry models might be directed and shaped by the interests and preferences of marginalized communities. Toward this end I employ the framework of "de-centering whiteness," which I understand as 1) a process of "exposing," as George Yancy writes, "the ways in which whites have created a form of "humanism" that obfuscates their hegemonic efforts to treat their experiences as universal and representative,"[171] and 2) an enduring commitment to behave individually and corporately in a way that prioritizes the lives and experiences of people of color and submits to their leadership. This final chapter will examine some Christian theological paradigms in terms of their usefulness towards this goal, and then return to some of the perspectives and ministry models described above to offer tentative suggestions as to what de-centering whiteness might look like in each case. The degree to which whiteness is embedded in the white psyche makes such efforts challenging and necessarily provisional. As Sullivan maintains, "the ugliness of a habit can trigger forceful but evasive psychosomatic resistance to conscious examination of

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[171] Yancy, *Look, A White!*, 7.

it."[172] MacMullan, on the other hand, is more optimistic, arguing that habits of whiteness

"must be engaged directly to the best of our ability through inquiry and

reconstruction."[173] Either way, I believe that a commitment to de-centering whiteness

constitutes an act of faithfulness to the Christian tradition in which these urban ministries

originate, and its call to love and honor all people.

## Theological Models for Diversity and Solidarity

*Visions of Community*

The dynamics of gentrification in racially diverse neighborhoods and the value

placed on racial reconciliation by many urban ministry practitioners calls for theological

models of community which can challenge dominant white patterns of community

formation, and approach to place. One such approach is Jung Young Lee's use of the

category of *marginality* in his theology of discipleship and community formation, drawn

largely from the experience of Americans of East Asian descent. While Lee's

understanding of marginality is multi-faceted, it revolves around the lived experience of

people in subordinated social groups, whether based on race, gender, or sexuality. This

category is then contrasted with *centrality*, which refers to the experience and mindset

inherent to dominant social groups. "This inclination to be at the center seems to be an

intrinsic human drive. In the history of civilization, the center attracted humanity more

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[172] Sullivan, 9.

[173] MacMullan, 76.

than any other thing in the world, for the center has been understood as the locus of

power, wealth, and honor."[174]

Lee sees this "inclination to be at the center" as a fundamentally sinful one—

because it denies the value of difference in God's creation. A desire for uniformity must

be resisted in favor of an appreciation of plurality. "The centralistic ideology of sameness

and singularity, therefore, creates a double negation, the negation of God's creative order

by negating the existence of difference."[175] This is particularly true in the case of white

supremacy, as "white Americans marginalize ethnic minorities because they value their

singularity, whiteness, more than a broader plurality." The way toward a resolution of this

problem passes through a thorough and robust appreciation of differences between

people. "Mere recognition of difference is not enough. We must believe that plurality is

God's creative order and irreducible to singularity. When singularity is prized above

plurality, the result is alienation of those who are different."[176]

This emphasis on plurality also appears in the work of Oscar García-Johnson, in

*The Mestizo/a Community of the Spirit: A Postmodern Latino/a Ecclesiology.* García-

Johnson's primary focus is developing theological understandings of community from a

Latino/a perspective, and uses the language of *mestizaje* to connote heterogeneity and

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[174] Jung Young Lee, *Marginality: The Key to Multicultural Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 31.

[175] Ibid., 108.

[176] Ibid., 109.

difference.[177] When he applies this concept to the church, he envisions it as "a place of

self-*discovery*, of being enriched by the fluidity of *other* cultural identities, of

encountering a *common intersection* for surviving, hoping, and believing in the

possibility of a better future."[178] Another theological vision centering the value of

difference is offered by Traci C. West, who calls Christians to an ethic that expresses

"salvific defiance of customs that treat peoples, cultural identities, and any aspect of

intrinsic human dignity as disposable or sacrificeable." West then contends that

"Christian commitment to such an ethic would have to evidence ongoing forms of doing

and being that salvifically defy cultural assertions of one group's moral right to be known

as innately superior."[179]

This orientation toward difference is a necessary one for Christians moving into

racially and culturally "different" neighborhoods, as encounters with difference on the

part of gentrifiers can often be characterized by simple discomfort and avoidance or,

more perniciously, a minimizing of cultural difference with regard to place-making that

inadequately addresses the economic and cultural disruption brought on by gentrification.

Insufficient acknowledgment of and appreciation for difference can also shape how urban

ministry communities are structured, often assuming predominantly white practices as

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[177] Oscar García-Johnson, *The Mestizo/a Community of the Spirit: A Postmodern Latino/a Ecclesiology* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2009), 105.

[178] Ibid., 120.

[179] Traci C. West, "When a White Man-God is the Truth and the Way for Black Christians," in *Christology and Whiteness: What Would Jesus Do?* ed. George Yancy (New York, NY: Routledge, 2012), 124.

normative. While it is common to hear exhortations in white urban ministry contexts to

"come willing to learn" or "prepare to be transformed" by their community experience, a

thoroughgoing commitment to plurality requires a willingness to allow one's priorities,

cultural forms, and ways of communicating to be experienced as one option of many,

rather than the implicit center of "how things are done." It is one thing to tolerate or

accept different ways of being in community from a safe distance; it is another to allow

those other ways to shape and challenge one's own being. People of color living in a

society shaped by white hegemony experience this pressure to conform to a different way

of being on a constant basis, as a matter of necessity. For white urban ministry

practitioners it is a choice. This disparity at the societal level is at the root of the

challenges involved when whites minister in racially diverse contexts, and failure to take

this imbalance into account makes the perpetuation of whiteness more likely. As Korie

Edwards puts it in *The Elusive Dream*, "racial hierarchies are dependent upon latent

ideologies and group interests, not on overt missions or policies. These ideologies and

group interests will prevail even in cases where there are contrary policies in place."[180]

*The White Subject in Theological Imagination*

Disrupting these deep ideologies and group interests at the psychological level

requires that great care be taken in how white Christians understand their role in

community formation and in the pursuit of social justice. For example, Jennifer Harvey

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[180] Edwards, 136.

illustrates how the popular evangelical formulation "What Would Jesus Do?" can actually

operate to center whiteness in spite of its ostensible intent to encourage Christians to live

out the ethics of Jesus. Harvey acknowledges that understanding Jesus as advocating for

justice for the marginalized is a plausible interpretation of his significance for the church

today—"Clearly, social justice Jesus would stand with those most harmed and

marginalized by whiteness."[181] For white urban ministry practitioners interested in racial

justice, it is understandable that the model of "being like Christ" could easily be enfolded

into a community or ministry project directed toward service or advocacy for the

marginalized. However, Harvey questions the appropriateness of white Christians

identifying with Jesus in the multiracial context, given the historical tendency for well-

meaning white activists to place themselves in a "savior" position:

> It just so happens that identifying with or as the central agent in the narratives we
> embody is one of the broken ways of being toward which white people are prone.
> It just so happens that being inclined to do "for" in postures that are paternalistic
> is another damaged side-effect of white racialization. And it just so happens that
> these tendencies are valorized in the social justice Jesus who is the central power-
> agent in his saga.[182]

Harvey cites examples from the Civil Rights Movement in which "It was the

presence of well-intentioned white people who were inclined to dominate agenda-setting,

[and] take on racism in paternalistic postures … that actually reiterated the very white

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[181] Jennifer Harvey, "What Would Zacchaeus Do? The Case for *Dis*identifying with Jesus," in *Christology and Whiteness*, 94.

[182] Ibid.

dominance characteristic of white supremacy."[183] Similarly Chris Budden, speaking as a

white Australian pastor involved in justice movements for Indigenous people, reminds us

that "White people do not see their own color, or how their life and position is simply

accepted as normal. They do not see how easy it is for them to speak, make decisions, or

exercise power in a gathering with Indigenous people."[184] Given these ever-present

power dynamics, and the general inability of most white people to perceive them, a

theological move to identify oneself as representing Jesus does have the potential for

encouraging a more paternalistic mode of being even if that is not consciously desired.

A rather different account of what it means to follow Christ, and the appropriate

role white Christians might play in racial justice and reconciliation, is given by James

Cone in *A Black Theology of Liberation*. Cone grounds his understanding of the nature of

God in the particular context of black struggle against racism:

> [B]lack theology proclaims God's blackness. Those who want to know who God
> is and what God is doing must know who black persons are and what they are
> doing. This does not mean lending a helping hand to the poor and unfortunate
> blacks of society….Knowing God means being on the side of the oppressed,
> becoming *one* with them, and participating in the goal of liberation. *We must
> become black with God![185]*

In Cone's theology, the potential to "become black with God" is open to all who truly

desire to devote themselves to fighting injustice. Lest any white Christian become over-

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[183] Ibid.

[184] Chris Budden, *Following Jesus in Invaded Space: Doing Theology on Aboriginal Land* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2009), 59.

[185] James Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 2nd ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1986), 65.

excited and quickly line up to "become black," however, Cone also cautions that

"Whenever black people have entered into a mutual relationship with white people, with

rare exceptions, the relationship has always worked to the detriment of our struggle."[186]

In *God of the Oppressed,* he outlines a rather stringent set of requirements for such a

conversion, maintaining that "white converts, if there are any to be found, must be *made*

to realize that they are like babies who have barely learned how to walk and talk. Thus

they must be told when to speak and what to say, otherwise they will be excluded from

our struggle."[187]

     While such pronouncements will strike most white ears as overly dogmatic and

exclusive, they speak directly out of the kind of experiences described by Harvey, in

which well-intentioned whites act instinctively out of behavioral patterns established in a

social location of dominance. Intuitive attitudes to place, developed through the process

of grandiosity development as outlined in the previous chapter, also inevitably shape

white interactions with people of color in such a way that the preferences of whites end

up determining community culture and approaches to social issues. Because these

processes are so structurally pervasive, and psychologically embedded, any process of

counteracting them on the part of white people requires a conscious, determined re-

positioning of one's identity and a commitment to centering the experiences of

marginalized people, along the lines of what Cone describes.

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[186] Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, Rev. ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997), 220.

[187] Ibid., 222.

Harvey describes this stance in terms of becoming "race- and power-cognizant race traitors," who actively develop consciousness of their social position and privileges, and in response commit to "identify and strategically disrupt those very social processes and systems that produce our white identities."[188] She suggests that white people adopt Zacchaeus from the Gospel of Luke as one to identify with, as someone thoroughly complicit with existing power structures who repents and takes radical material action by giving away half of his wealth.[189] Budden suggests that, when engaging in dialogue and community with people who have been marginalized,

> this is a conversation in which we [white people] are guests, in which it is not about what we want, but what Indigenous people want…. The best we can do is prepare ourselves to listen, to be able to hear hard things that we do not like to hear, and to remain silent rather than to immediately defend ourselves. It is the silence that waits for the invitation to speak rather than always claiming our right to contribute, and shape the conversation.[190]

This is the essence of de-centering for white people—to be willing to set aside what intuitively feels right, understanding that our intuitions have been shaped by a social context that encourages our own expansiveness, and that we operate from a deficit of significant mutual relationships with people of different cultures and social locations. De-centering whiteness is an ongoing posture of humility and learning, taken up not as a magnanimous gesture of self-sacrifice, but as a simple willingness to take our appropriate place in genuinely reciprocal relationships.

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[188] Harvey, 97-98.

[189] Luke 19:1-10.

[190] Budden, 161.

*Prophetic Structural Critique*

In addition to transforming interpersonal interracial dynamics, a stance of de-centering whiteness commits to questioning the legitimacy of the present racialized social order on the deepest levels. Perhaps the most common attitude among whites toward structural racism is a general acknowledgment and regret of overt racial violence, enslavement, and atrocities, while nevertheless maintaining that the resultant status quo of inequality is more or less acceptable. Certainly this is the attitude toward gentrification most often expressed among urban ministry practitioners in previous chapters. Budden traces this mindset to Western conceptions of civilizational progress since the Enlightenment:

> The belief was that Europe was on the leading edge of the economic development that was so crucial to this progress. This justified colonial expansion and invasion, and provided a cover for the suffering of indigenous peoples. Their suffering was one of the unfortunate consequences of progress, a small thing within the bigger picture.[191]

In the contemporary U.S. context, the justification for racial inequality is often framed in terms of the importance of individual freedom, and the dismantling of overt legal discrimination. "Individualistic explanations," Edwards writes, "like the American dream, that tie success to people's hard work rather than to structural realities, are used to make sense of racial minorities' perpetual disadvantage."[192] Even when whites do acknowledge

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[191] Budden, 107.

[192] Edwards, 122.

structural injustice, however, there most often remains an orientation toward working

within the trajectory of established social patterns, such as gentrification.

Budden challenges the church to respond to oppressive systems past and present

with a much more confrontational stance, with

> a willingness to name invasion and its consequences as evil.. What occurred was
> not simply an unfortunate side effect of progress and European economic
> expansion. It was evil…. I am speaking about action that is opposed to God,
> action that undermines and disturbs God's desire for life and wholeness, and
> which harms God's image-bearing people in their communal and individual
> lives.[193]

In essence, Budden is calling Christians to refuse to settle for anything less than God's

complete liberating vision for humanity, in which the dignity of all people in all their

diversity is embraced and empowered to flourish. While our day-to-day lives are

undoubtedly constrained by current social structures, the example of Christ calls us to

push at the leading edge of what is possible, to the point of personal risk. For those in the

dominant social position this requires a willingness to rethink, challenge, and dismantle

the very structures which produce our own sense of who we are and how the world

works. Taking this oppositional stance to the context which nurtures us and shapes our

thinking will necessarily involve a level of discomfort and disorientation, as it involves

detaching from our intuitive, emotional connections to place developed in our most

formative years. But authentic work toward justice requires that the lived experiences of

oppressed people form the interpretive grid for understanding just how far short the

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[193] Budden, 108.

current order falls from God's vision for creation. It also means that those of us who have

been shaped by a social context of dominance must learn to take our cue and our lead

from those who have been oppressed.

## De-Centering Whiteness in Urban Ministry Paradigms

So what does all of this mean, specifically, for urban ministry in gentrifying

neighborhoods? In a way, the very question already reproduces white habits of

emphasizing our own agency, desiring to "fix" our racialized systems, or attempting to

act in such a way that we might escape complicity. Sara Ahmed addresses this tendency,

warning that "To respond to accounts of institutional whiteness with the question 'what

can white people do?' is not only to return to the place of the white subject, but it is also

to locate agency in this place."[194] De-centering whiteness must, first and foremost, be a

process of recognizing and responding to the agency of people of color living on their

own terms and working for justice. In the interest of serving that larger goal, however, I

would like to offer some tentative suggestions for how urban ministries might think

creatively about shifting assumptions and behavior patterns towards the goal of de-

centering whiteness. I will address each major category of urban ministry in turn—church

plants, community development, and missional communities.

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[194] Ahmed, 164.

*Urban Church Planting*

Before I look at the specifics of urban church planting structures, I believe it is valid to at least raise the prospect that one response to gentrification patterns is for potential church planters to simply not go in the first place. I certainly run the risk of hypocrisy with this suggestion, since I chose to move to Seattle's Rainier Valley and consider the community I found there to be one of the most enduring blessings of my life. I cannot regret my decision. But given the popularity of urban ministry movements, the effects of gentrification, and the instinctive white attitudes toward place explained in previous chapters, it is worth cultivating a deeper attitude of discernment over whether such a move, or community, might do more harm than good. The more research and input from communities of color in those neighborhoods, the greater the chance of relocating with a deeper humility and better informed practices.

One common form of practice, which initially structured my own intentional community, is the home small group model. This structure for meeting and planning together is so ubiquitous in Protestant churches and church planting endeavors that the prospect of seriously modifying or abandoning it seems almost unthinkable. But the very factors which make small groups beneficial for churches building shared culture and commitment networks make them potentially problematic in racially and culturally diverse neighborhoods. Sociologist Orvic Pada explains that small groups made up primarily of neighborhood newcomers can function simply as enclaves within the surrounding neighborhood. Churches can "turn inwards for self-preservation, most

noticeably in areas where diversity increases. This is done to preserve mechanical

solidarity where people adhere to the same norms and values."[195]

Wilford in *Sacred Subdivisions* expands on the sociological function of small

groups:

> Small social groups can construct and maintain what Peter L. Berger calls
> 'plausibility structures'—tightly bound, locally shared systems of meaning—
> easier than large groups, and thus the intense, intimate, and personal religious
> experiences that would tie disparate individuals together into religious community
> would be best inculcated in small cell groups.[196]

This kind of intimacy and shared meaning contributes to cohesive community formation.

But in situations where part of the goal is engaging in community with long term

residents of different social locations, then group cohesion among neighborhood

newcomers might not be so desirable. Of course, if a group of people never meet together

then they do not really constitute a community at all, but perhaps options where the

incoming new community meets infrequently—perhaps monthly—might be pursued;

with greater emphasis placed on building relationships with neighborhood residents in

their own already-established community networks and structures. This would be a literal

act of "de-centering"—intentionally diluting the strength of the newcomers as a

community nucleus.

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[195] Orvic Pada, "Demographic Changes, Gentrification, and Religious Practice," in
Benesh, 148.

[196] Wilford, 91.

*Faith-Based Community Development*

We have already examined the attitudes toward gentrification expressed by Robert Lupton—here I would simply reiterate that a stance which simply accepts gentrification and displacement as necessary and given, without further emphasis on the needs and rights of those being displaced, requires a more radical critique. Additionally—while efforts to pool resources to enable residents to avoid displacement is an admirable one, special attention should also be paid to the intuitive assumptions which white middle- to upper-class Christians may hold about lower-income people—assumptions which are shaped from contexts of privilege rather than from deep relationships with the marginalized.

One example of this comes from a seemingly trivial comment by Jonathan Bradford, director of the Inner City Christian Federation (ICCF), an organization with a mission very similar to Lupton's FCS. In his interview with James K. A. Smith, Bradford discusses the importance of place-making (in line with the views of Eric Jacobsen described in Chapter 2), and his mixed-income housing developments. In the interview he refers to "kitchen workers" and "doctors" as examples of lower- and higher-income people, and emphasizes their shared need for "sidewalks that aren't cracked and broken" and "high-quality schools." He then discusses "structural aids" used to make housing accessible to lower-income people:

> If the doctor would like to have granite countertops in her unit, she can, okay?
> The kitchen worker probably isn't worried about granite and, by the way, doesn't

have extra money to afford the granite countertops. The kitchen worker will be very happy with plastic laminate.[197]

While the probability is high that a lower-income kitchen worker would not be able to afford granite countertops, the casual assumption that this worker "isn't worried about granite" reflects an underlying attitude about people with less means—an implicit sense that they simply do not care about aesthetics and quality materials to the extent that people of greater means do. What is problematic about this statement is not the actual preferences of a given individual kitchen worker so much as it is the instinctive framework through which Bradford understands people of a different social location than himself. De-centering whiteness in this ministry context would require, at a minimum, a rethinking of stereotypes and more intentional engagement with communities of color to learn what they actually *do* prefer and what they see as the solutions to wider social inequities. It would then almost certainly require a commitment to more radical structural change than simply accepting the displacement of many marginalized people.

*Missional Intentional Communities*

In many ways, the vision expressed by the authors of *The New Parish* for "rooting" in particular neighborhoods—including an emphasis on learning from one's place and their focus on relationship building—represent a posture most amenable to the

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[197] Jonathan Bradford and James K. A. Smith, "Inequality, Gentrification, and Justice: Continuing the Conversation with Jonathan Bradford," Comment, June 26, 2014, accessed November 20, 2014, http://www.cardus.ca/comment/article/4243/inequality-gentrification-and-justice-continuing-the-conversation-with-jonathan-bradford/

work of de-centering whiteness. Their learning posture is evident in how the annual

Inhabit conference has developed in recent years—speaking rosters have increasingly

featured people of color known for addressing issues of white supremacy such as Richard

Twiss and Christena Cleveland. My primary critique with *The New Parish* book, and the

movement which it represents, is not so much with what it teaches as with what it so far

still neglects to emphasize—namely, a thoroughgoing analysis of contemporary white

supremacy and a cognizance of white social power, particularly as they pertain to

relocating in diverse contexts.[198] As Jennifer Harvey explains,

> Our racial identities are not neutral phenomena, nor are they best understood as
> only, or primarily, cultural. They have political meaning and material content …
> Thus, systems of racial injustice are repeatedly inscribed on our very bodies as we
> move through such landscapes as racialized selves.[199]

An act as basic as moving into a new neighborhood carries with it racial freight

and power dynamics simply by virtue of the wider economic realities of gentrification

and the racialized society in which we live. While *The New Parish* celebrates the benefits

of "embodied faithful presence" in any given neighborhood,[200] it does not analyze the

possible unintended consequences that white presence might have on gentrifying

neighborhoods. Nor does it offer analysis of the power dynamics involved when

wealthier communities try to partner with poorer neighborhoods across racial divides. I

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[198] In their Introduction the authors do acknowledge that "a book penned by three
Caucasian males grossly fails to reflect the wonderful diversity of Christ's church" (Soerens,
Sparks, and Friesen, 16). What remains for further analysis is the social locatedness of their
perspectives.

[199] Harvey, 85.

[200] Soerens, Sparks, and Friesen, 73.

believe that insufficient analysis of these structural factors is the primary source of the frustration expressed by Jaime Arpin-Ricci in the first chapter, in his failure to "diversify his community" which is representative of so many other missional community attempts. Perhaps white Christians need to wrestle with the possibility that there is little liberative purpose in forming racially diverse communities initiated and led by white people, at least in the context of primarily non-white neighborhoods. If de-centering whiteness is the central value involved in forming communities geared toward liberation, then white Christians relocating into racially diverse neighborhood might consider prioritizing coming under leadership of already existing communities led by people of color.

As mentioned above, *The New Parish* does not purport to be a manual for racially diverse community, nor does it advocate relocating into diverse or gentrifying neighborhoods. Indeed, the majority of the book is characterized by a reticence toward making any specific prescription for how or where to engage in neighborhood rootedness, allowing readers to apply general principles to their specific situations. However, given the number of missional communities that *have* crossed racial and economic boundaries, and given the political interconnectedness of neighborhoods which are demographically very different (for example, saving a school from closure in one neighborhood often results in a closed school in another), the lack of racial power analysis (in the book and the movement in general) constitutes a vacuum which is then more likely to be filled with habits of whiteness.

The central point of the preceding critiques is to illustrate just how subliminal habits of whiteness can be. I myself am thoroughly complicit in acting out each of these habits and intuitive attitudes toward place. The reason I have emphasized the psychoanalytic paradigm in approaching the question of whiteness is in an attempt to better understand how our deeply ingrained commitments and habits are formed, to the point where they are constantly reproducing themselves in spite of conscious desires to pursue justice and equality. For a white male such as myself, committing to a posture of de-centering whiteness is difficult not simply because it threatens the advantages conferred by white supremacy (although it does do that), but because those advantages shape white culture, tastes, and instincts in every facet of life. Therefore de-centering whiteness must be an ongoing, resolute endeavor—a receptivity to experience over and over again radical disorientation and deconstruction of one's understanding of what it means to be human. It is only in this commitment, however, that white people can have any legitimate chance at participating in the movement towards a more just, vibrant human community that honors the full being of each and every person.

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Daniel James Hauge

Born 1973
Boston University School of Theology
745 Commonwealth Avenue
Boston, MA. 02215

**EDUCATION**
**Boston University School of Theology, Boston, MA — Master of Sacred Theology, 2015**
Area of Concentration: Practical Theology.

**Regent College, Vancouver, BC—Master of Divinity, 2002**
Area of Concentration: New Testament

**Western Washington University, Bellingham, WA—Bachelor of Arts, 1996**
Major: Liberal Studies—Minor: Attic Greek

**AWARDS AND HONORS**
Academic Entrance Scholarship — Regent College, 1998

Honors Program Outstanding Graduate—Western Washington University, 1996

Liberal Studies Department Award Scholarship—Western Washington University, 1996

**EXPERIENCE**
Claims Entry Analyst, Regence Blue Shield, Seattle, WA — 2002-2013

Youth Leadership Team, Emerald City Bible Fellowship; Seattle, WA — 2011-2013

Adult Education Co-Director, Emerald City Bible Fellowship; Seattle, WA — 2008-2010

Direct Service Volunteer, New Horizons Minstries; Seattle, WA — 2007-2010