

Chapter 4

Social Change: The Power of Place

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ABSTRACT

The differences between states and within states are profound, and while that has long been true, it is much more consequential to LGBT individuals since the legalization of same-sex marriage. Social change relating to LGBT issues were originally addressed in a 1997 article written by Thomas Stoddard titled “Bleeding Heart: Reflections on Using the Law to Make Social Change.” This chapter uses his framework and examines legislative responses to the legalization of same-sex marriage focusing on place.

INTRODUCTION

In our everyday lives, we typically do not think about place and are therefore unaware and unconcerned by the increasingly placeless character of the contemporary world. The primacy of place in experience—that everything and everyone is in place—is that place is an essential precondition for the existence of anything. Societies are not only shaped by their places, their places shape them, and these places are experienced as communities and a shared culture.

Place is experienced in the buildings we inhabit and in those daily rituals of dwelling that bind us to a place as home, which constructs a community through shared cultivation. Our globalized way of life, now epitomized by the contemporary business traveler and the tourist, is one in which place is more important than it was when people were rooted to one place. We cannot know how far we have gone or how different the places or the people are we have visited without reference to the permanent place that is our home. Our ability to judge, our ethical foundation, is founded in our place. Places do not only orient us as physical, experiencing bodies on the earth, they also orient us as acting, ethical beings in the world.

Differences in place produce varied political cultures that construct different values, beliefs, attitudes, and expectations of citizens toward the political system and as participants in it. In the U.S., these beliefs are increasingly codified by both demographics and geographical location. Political systems and actors

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-6684-3674-5.ch004

are now characterized as either “red” or “blue,” which translates into legislative decision making and electorate voting behavior (Pallay, 2013).

Each color represents a different paradigm that extends beyond politics and reveals divergent social worlds. The idea of red (Republican) and blue (Democrat) states, places within a state, or individuals has become commonplace. The general understanding is that *blue* denotes the politically liberal, while *red* is characterized as conservative. Red areas adhere to traditional values and are often opposed to what they believe to be radical social changes such as granting or extending LGBT rights. These regions tend to be rural and people tend to be more religious, less educated, and not mobile. In contrast, blue communities have taken hold in urban areas and along the coasts and are increasingly Democratic, where the presence and importance of choice, diversity, and change is commonplace.

The realities of these differences are far more complicated than the simple contrast between red and blue. At the core of these distinctions are deep social divisions over changing values and lifestyles that shape and are expressed in the politics of place. Recognizing that red and blue families live different lives has dominated legal and political debates for some time. Ideologically, legislators from a red or a blue state have different worldviews that influence and mold their decision making. Rights for an LGBT individual vary from region to region, state-to-state, and even within states, shaped by a variety of factors from partisanship, to public opinion, to migration and immigration, all of which influence the content of laws and policies. Each of these elements offers examples of their dynamic and interactive nature on social and political processes, wherein particular relationships are established, reproduced, or transformed.

THE FRAMEWORK APPLIED TO LGBT ISSUES

Thomas Stoddard’s 1997 article, “Bleeding Heart: Reflections on Using the Law to Make Social Change” (“Bleeding Heart”), offers a framework for social change—four factors necessary for a culture shift to occur. Hunter (1997) and Sobel (2015) added a fifth dimension of social change—public engagement, which explains the speed at which cultural transformation occurs. Using these elements of change, this chapter examines the links between place and inequality:

(1) A change that is very broad or profound; (2) Public awareness of that change; (3) General sense of the legitimacy (or validity) of the change; (4) Overall, continuous enforcement of the change (Stoddard, 1997); and (5) Public engagement. (Hunter, 1997; Sobel, 2015)

The human significance of space and place invoke the concepts of attachment, identity, and belonging, each influencing the political significance of people’s psychological representations of space. These shape people’s understandings of who belongs, the rights and freedoms that people may claim and exercise, decisions about where we feel “at home” or “out of place,” where we may move or avoid, and much more. The social and political significance of place and its psychological representation may (ironically) lead us to underestimate the degree to which place and space have political significance for our daily routines and decision making.

In countless everyday settings and mundane social interactions, representations of place and space matter. They impact who can be where, affect how people are included or excluded from public spaces, and shape the ways in which people relate to one another. In short, place and space play a central role in the ways that large-scale and abstract social categories such as “nation,” “class,” “race,” and “gay or

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