

Chapter 5

Social Change: The Power of Place

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

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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 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.

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