

CULTURAL HEGEMONY

Good morning. Tahn si ki ya? How are you? Thank you for your invitation to share with you some thoughts on CULTURAL HEGEMONY. This topic is of such critical importance today, given the escalating racial violence we see every day in the news, social media, and experience in our various institutions. Our focus in this 20 minute presentation is **1)** to begin with some descriptive definitions of terms related to cultural hegemony; **2)** to describe the continuity of and the systemic nature of cultural hegemony with an example from education; **3)** to reflect on the destructive and violent nature of cultural hegemony; and **4)** to convince you of our beautiful potential for creating an ethno-sphere for systemic transformation.

PART I

Let us begin with some descriptive definitions so that we have a common understanding of terms that are integral to

understanding the comprehensive nature of cultural hegemony:

1. **CULTURAL HEGEMONY:** The graphic video of three police officers kneeling on a black man's neck, midback, and legs for 8 minutes 46 seconds so he could not move or breathe is a powerful visual for CULTURAL HEGEMONY. They had power over him.
2. **ETHNOCENTRISM:**¹It is the tendency to see, interpret, and judge other cultures based on our own beliefs and perceptions. The ultimate outcome of ethnocentrism is to invalidate the other culture because it fails to measure up to what is perceived to be the "superior" culture.
3. **RACE:** There is no biological basis for race. Race is a socio-cultural construct existing in the mind, not in physical reality.
4. **RACISM:** Only one select group of people exerts systemic power over other socio-cultural groups. They identify themselves as "white." Only these people with the

¹ Karl G. Heider Seeing Anthropology, 2nd edition. Allyn and Bacon 2001, p. 14.

power-base, or white privilege, can be identified as racist. Racism is the exertion of power over someone else who does not share the same values and beliefs as the dominant or "white" culture.

PART 11

One of the more revealing studies that illustrates cultural hegemony in standardized testing was conducted by ²Professor Jaap Tuinman in 1979. It was designed to determine if prior knowledge played a role in reading comprehension. He hypothesized that we interpret new information based on what we know or do not know about new information. He tested middle school students using five different standardized tests: the Stanford Achievement Test, the Iowa Test of Basic Skills, the California Test of Basic Skills, and so on. Group A consisted of white students from the dominant culture and Group B consisted of students of color from various minority cultural groups. The Group A test for the white students included only the questions, not

² Note: The bad news is that I cannot find this article so I cannot cite specifics...

the reading passages. The Group B test for the students of color included **both** the reading passages and accompanying questions. Who do you think scored the highest? No surprise here. Group A (the White students) scored the highest. A "racist person" could conclude that these immigrants and "Indians" are just plain stupid and "white" students are superior because they are smarter. End of story.

However, if one looks more closely at reading comprehension, one could argue that the "white" students were already familiar with the content so the odds were that they would choose the "correct" response, which was normed and validated according to the shared prior knowledge of their dominant, majority culture, whereas, the minority students interpreted the reading passages according to their prior knowledge which was different from that of the dominant culture. It made sense that their "incorrect" responses would be "sifted" through their unique cultural lens, impacting their different interpretation of text passages.

PART 111

Our systems perpetuate different acts of violence.

³When discussing collective trauma, Otto Scharmer and Thomas Hubl identify three levels of violence: Direct Violence, Structural Violence, and Attentional Violence.

We are probably most aware of DIRECT VIOLENCE, enacted through physical, emotional or psychological abuse. Historically, one of the more heinous acts was the genocide of the indigenous people in the United States, having eliminated all but 239,000 of the 15,000,000+ people that originally lived here.

STRUCTURAL VIOLENCE is manifested in our economic structures, especially when we move from a financial capitalism to a surveillance capitalism, manifested in manipulation, and blame. The most vulnerable to structural violence are, those people without the powerbase—the people of color.

³ Collective Trauma and Our Emerging Future by C. Otto Scharmer and Thomas Hubl, Winter 2019.
<https://collectivetraumasummit.com>

ATTENTIONAL VIOLENCE is designed not to see another person, another human being, in terms of their highest future possibility. This mindset creates a construct that allows a group of people to be dehumanized as we see with our present immigrants and ethnic minorities.

Attentional violence is particularly personal to me as a Native person because we are invisible, hidden away on remote Reservations with poverty levels at an unbelievable 73% on Rocky Boy Reservation in Montana (my Mother's Reservation) and similar levels on other Reservations.

I am adding ATTITUDINAL VIOLENCE evident in the 1939 film—Stagecoach, directed by John Ford and starring John Wayne in his breakout role as the macho guy in charge of getting the passengers safely to their respective destinations. Each of the “white” characters is two dimensional but, at least, we see them as “human beings.” In contrast, the invisible savages threatening their lives are never seen. Eventually, the thud of arrows on the stage and the horrified expressions of the passengers underscore the

violence and savagery of the Indians. These stereotypes are still present today on Turtle Mountain Reservation. The residents in a town 18 miles West of the Reservation refuse to drive through our agency town for fear of being attacked by wild Indians. They will drive an additional 20 miles to skirt the Reservation. I am not joking!

⁴All segments of our country share the collective trauma of cultural hegemony emanating from our worldview of dominance and subjugation. In many respects we are creating an **ecological divide**—a severance of self to nature; a **social divide** of self to other; and, finally, a **spiritual divide** of self to self.

Our **ecological divide** is widened by our own ignorance of the “web” of life. We are connected to the living Earth and to other life forms. Take trees, for example, we cannot survive without the trees. We are interconnected. Yet, we are clearcutting trees with abandon convincing ourselves that we

⁴ Collective Trauma and Our Emerging Future by C. Otto Scharmer and Thomas Hubl, Winter 2019.
<https://collectivetraumasummit.com>

have an endless supply. We are also fossil fuel hogs. Our machines are ruling us in so many ways. We are destroying our planet on every level still unaware that we are destroying not only our physical well-being but our emotional and spiritual well-being as well.

Our **social divide** is literally destroying our democracy. Our leaders politicize every act for financial gain as we are currently seeing in the Trump administration. Our national narrative has essentially distorted the telling of our country's history with its perpetuation of "fake news" under the guise of "manifest destiny" and self-righteousness, literally taking us to the brink of self-destruction. How are we going to learn from history if we do not include all the contributing voices that lend wisdom to our country's narrative?

Our **spiritual divide** is a separation of our entire being from our very essence, from our purpose. Our society has bounded our spirits with its emphasis on fear of the unknown and guilt from the past. Each of us is a continuity beyond our

physical form. ⁵ Each of us is a unique expression of our original emergence from the soup of neutrinos, photons, quarks, and strings created from the cosmic eruptions as mysterious as our longing to explore the visible and invisible planes of our existence where we encounter the verticality of the invisible plane intersecting with the horizontal, leveling experience of the visible plane.

PART IV

In closing, we ask ourselves what do we do to change our systems that dehumanize not only the powerless, but all of us? I think we have the option of seeing beauty in the problem. If we focus exclusively on the problem, we continue our “freeze” reaction; freezing the mind, the heart and the will—stuck in ignorance, hate and fear. We need the balance of the **beautiful** that requires an open mind, open heart, and open will, which is possible if we access our capacity for curiosity,

⁵ **Secrets of Your Cells:** Discovering Your Body's Inner Intelligence by Sondra Barrett, Ph.D. P. 7.

compassion, and courage to create an ethno-sphere to replace our ego-sphere of dominance and control.

We need to create and nurture an ethno-sphere that encompasses ⁶the sum-total of all thoughts, dreams, myths, ideas, inspirations, and intuitions brought into being by the human imagination since the dawn of consciousness. This ethno-sphere is the web of spiritual life and cultural life that envelops the planet and is as important as the biosphere—the biological web of life.

In practical terms ethno-sphere means telling the entire story of our national narrative: the good, the bad, and the ugly; it means learning from each other and working together to shape the naked geography of hope that becomes etched within our hearts that are big enough to learn that power over is to be without soul, and power within is to recognize that ⁷“...this world deserves to exist in a diverse way, that we can

⁶ Wade Davis. Dreams from Endangered Cultures. P. 8. TED Talks
https://www.ted.com/talks/wade_davis_dreams_from_endangered_cultures?language=en

⁷ Wade Davis. Dreams from Endangered Cultures. P. 8. TED Talks
https://www.ted.com/talks/wade_davis_dreams_from_endangered_cultures?language=en

find a way to live in a truly multicultural, pluralistic world where all of the wisdom of all peoples contribute to our collective well-being." Together, let us transform our current problems into their beautiful potential.

I end with a poem entitled, ⁸"Just Beyond Yourself" by David Whyte.

Just beyond
yourself.

*It's where
you need
to be.*

*Half a step
into
self-forgetting
and the rest
restored
by what
you'll meet.*

There is a road
always beckoning.

When you see
the two sides
of it

⁸ <https://onbeing.org/poetry/just-beyond-yourself/>

closing together
at that far horizon
and deep in
the foundations
of your own
heart
at exactly
the same
time,
that's how
you know
it's the road
you
have
to follow.

That's how
you know
it's where
you
have
to go.

That's how
you know
you have
to go.

That's
how you know.

Just beyond
yourself,
it's
where you
need to be.

I am grateful to walk with you in Beauty. Ki ta ta mi in.

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