

2022 July 5 Allegiance to Gratitude

It's late in the evening of July 5th, after a 4th marked by another mass shooting, this one in Chicago, one more added to the more than 300 in the US so far this year.

This afternoon I was in town being interviewed for Patricia Worth's "BoHo Bisbee" program on the local KBRP community radio station. Our conversation touched on a variety of topics related to the history of Bisbee as it developed from a more or less defunct copper mining town 50 years ago (in the bust phase of the boom-and-bust cycle), through a period as a vibrant arts colony, to its current thriving condition as a popular tourist destination.

Meandering through our conversation was a persistent theme in that history, the question of community, its various meanings and implications for how we relate to each other, to our built and natural environments, how we understand each other and our doings, our lives, in the world.

Among other things, we spoke (with the precarious current state of our democracy in mind) of socio-political issues dear to the hearts of many of us who came to the area in the 70s -- things like peace, social, economic and participatory democracy, consensus decision-making, cooperative lifestyle, diversity, equality.

Toward the end of the interview I brought up a new term I had recently learned from Robin Wall Kimmerer's "Braiding Sweetgrass": animacy, a word referring not only to our socio-political relations in the usual sense of democracy, plutocracy, hierarchy and so forth, but to our relations to the non-human community as well, to the living world we are part of, depend on, and in so many ways abuse.

When I came home this evening, I picked up Kimmerer's book and started to read where I had left off a couple of nights ago, at a chapter she calls "Allegiance to Gratitude." A few lines in, during her recounting of her daughter, when she was in the sixth-grade, refusing to stand with the other pupils to recite the Pledge of Allegiance with its "under God" language and implied promise of "liberty and justice for all, phrases Kimmerer's daughter as a Native American felt she would be lying if she recited.

On reading that, I was immediately taken back to Bisbee, not to the recording studio but to a public hearing by the county Planning and Zoning Commission a couple of weeks ago when, though I stood up when everyone else did, I did not put my hand over my heart and did not recite the pledge (a practice I'd begun at the age of 13 shortly after Congress and Eisenhower added the "under God" language). With the 2/4 beat of the group recital as soundtrack, my mind was running an instant replay of Black Lives Matter, the Supreme Court, Christian nationalism, white supremacy, the J6 insurrection, voting rights cutbacks, border refugees, climate extinction and other insults to my sense of community and the promise of liberty and justice for all.

After I finished reading the chapter, I was glad to find it available as a free download on the Web.

<https://moodle.swarthmore.edu/pluginfile.php/487604/course/section/169180/Kimmerer%20AL>

LEGIANCE.pdf