

Sherece West-Scantlebury
First Person Plural Project
#2 Tape Summary
09 October 2014

Intro – First Person Plural Project – focusing on life since came to Arkansas

MN Describe how got to Arkansas

SWS Recruited to come to the Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation [WRF]

Working with Louisiana Disaster Recovery Foundation (now Foundation for Louisiana)
Loved job in Louisiana, didn't want to leave
Recommended by colleagues, top of the field-Ralph Smith and Linetta Gilbert
Declining, said those two magic names
Certain folks who recommend, have to respond

Less about not wanting to come to WRF, more that enjoying work in
rebuild of Louisiana

Came to interview as professional courtesy
Didn't think they would call back
"They're way too conservative, they're not going to call me back."

Said to God if don't get job, no hard feelings
If I do I will go
That's how I got here, to WRF and Little Rock, Arkansas

MN Goals and mission?

SWS Use my time, talent, and treasure to work on behalf of vulnerable families

5 min

Transform communities into positive, productive communities
What the WRF is about

MN First task?

SWS Board tasked with developing strategic plan
First six months freed from anything but learning about Arkansas
Six months talking to any and everybody

Developing grant-making strategy relevant to Arkansas

Two basic questions: what does state need? How can WRF be responsive?

Same refrain: state needs to move out of poverty and improve education outcomes
To the person - same thing repeatedly

SWS Took response, crafted "Moving the Needle" plan

MN What was different or the same about Arkansas?

SWS Don't know if particularly different

When decision to disinvest or not invest in a community, results are same

Poor streets, housing, school system

People heartbroken, down-hearted

Breed depression, hopelessness, families not doing well.

Decisions not to invest have to do with race; people don't want to talk to

10 min

SWS State government run by white men until 60's

Sure didn't wake up thinking they would destroy such community

Investing in area— mainly wealthy, middle class, white families

Don't invest in these poor families

Well documented based on race – or income

Lack of investment gone on for up to 50 years

To get infrastructures to work, cost hundreds of millions of dollars

Folks now have to fight for resources necessary

Fight goes on and on

Ask if it's different, not different

Decision to not invest consistently, in right areas, creates cost

We bear burden of cost

When we do want to invest, much more difficult.

Communities still have human beings, children and families

How does philanthropy act as catalyst of positive change?

15 min

How to ensure communities have voice, capacity, will to push government to make changes

MN How do you build capacity and will?

SWS When have devastation of human spirit - extremely hard

Begin where spark of hope, something to build on

MN Do you have example, spark of hope?

SWS Discusses strategic planning and implementation support for community-wide plan for North Jonesboro

No new housing, infrastructure, investments in schools, over 30 years

Pulled together collaborative – across race, class, ethnicity, to rebuild

[North Jonesboro Neighborhood Initiative]

Can't leave whole segment of city out

Discusses Blytheville initiative

A lot of young people languishing, not participating in labor force

Survey where young people ask young people why

20 min

SWS Paid for support
[Mississippi County Arkansas Economic Opportunity Commission]
Facilitated programming and initiatives based on what they heard

Could really be example rural communities across country could use

MN About historical disinvestment, when and how did you recognize?

SWS Because everyone had the same story
Dudley Street, Boston; Ward 7, D.C.; Denver; Philadelphia - same story
Community I came from in West Baltimore – same story

Some people made decisions to use dollars for this and not that

Did not use in communities of color, poor communities

Not world according to Sherece, can back up, well documented

Same story over and over and over again

Same story continues

Discusses FHA [Federal Housing Administration] and mortgages, GI Bill [Servicemen's
Readjustment Act], Suburbanization

Still live in that construct today

This isn't structural racism I'm making up

25 min

Whether intentional or not –written in that it's been intentional

Laws were written that wrote out people, excluded people

Not enabling group to have access to capital, destroys community

People wonder why there aren't more minority businesses

Created folk who are workers, historically turned away from capital

Let's not talk about Native American communities, horrific lack of access Creates negativity that permeates so many of our Native communities

It has been the same policy and procedure over and over and over again

Today want to disregard structural barriers, still deal with consequences

Created construct for hundreds of years

People do care

Created set of citizens where aspiration has been beat out, haven't been able to gain access equally

MN When start learning about structural nature of policies?

30 min

SWS When started work in advocacy and policy
In terms of my background, all connects

Why do poor people have to demand a traffic light?
Four kids have been killed, put up a damn traffic light
Why do we got to march for a traffic light?
Honestly didn't understand, why this much drama
Another community nice and tree-lined and a stop sign every two blocks
Had to find out why
Tax base, voting patterns, civic behavior
Expectations government, policy responsive to needs

Construct of institutional racism became very clear

Quest from beginning

Formally learned through education
When working at Rebuilding Communities Initiative at Annie E. Casey Foundation, knowing structure helped me know what up against

Even in Arkansas, school boards
Families running areas for years
White judge, white lawyer, white long-time families, white mayors
You see it, the same

Poor people in those communities feel they can't go against structure
People of color feel like they're not a part

35 min

Rarely invited to participate, marginalized
I go to these communities and everyone in leadership is white
At some point I even had to ask, "Are there black people here?"

People don't mean harm, but no intention of going across the street
No on intentional about including all voices, dropping prejudices
"They do this", "they do that," both sides
Tennis ball goes back and forth

Nothing will change unless groups break down, work together
community and community here in Arkansas
Not all, some better - DeQueen, Blytheville, Jonesboro, Northwest Arkansas

Other thing I hear, "If we push or demand, they retaliate"
No one burning crosses or lynching, but now get fired, blackballed, scorned

MN As leader, how received when discuss issues?

SWS Walk upon it in way I hope is productive
In Augusta, they said, “We know we need to do this, but we haven’t”
Worked with who were comfortable with, who they knew

40 min

SWS Have to come to conclusion that leaving out segment of brothers and sisters

Discusses recent study on whites not having black or Latino friends Fascinated about it

Are we intentionally crossing the street?
Why their responsibility to come to you?
All responsibility on poor folks, or people of color
Folk with privilege take no responsibility in building relationship

Gotten training on how to speak about it
In ways I can talk about this, I do
About being more inclusive
WRF will support you, but we have social justice mandate
Governor Rockefeller, very intentional about being inclusive
Cannot fund all white, all middle, upper-middle class change process
Communities where honest, ask for help
In others, not openness and willingness
Can’t change your heart and mind, have to go where recognized this is for all

MN WRF always had inclusivity mandate?

SWS: It has, because that’s who governor was

MN How view role of philanthropy within system?

SWS Philanthropy is resource provider
Don’t have the level of money of government

45 min

Leverage dollars from systems, convene, build capacity, facilitate process, experiment with ways to do community change
Bully pulpit
Board comfortable with saying, “This is an injustice, needs to change”

Discusses WRF partnership with Walton Family Foundation for comprehensive P-16 [prekindergarten through postsecondary] education plan for state

MN Coming from type of community you want to influence

SWS In career have seen communities change, transform
Dudley Street in Boston, so horrific
People came, dumped washing machines, had that much regard for residents

It was a dump
Decisions made to not invest in that area, historically area of color
Today, able to safely walk child to school
New houses, people who are proud
Over 20-year process

50 min

Takes time and investment
Change can happen
Building leadership
For philanthropy, investing and encouraging others to invest
For city and state, holding accountable
Training residents to work within systems, be voice to be reckoned with
Philanthropy plays that role

Great deal of hope for change in Arkansas
Will not be overnight, may not be in my tenure
If I can move us closer, I will have accomplished a lot with my team
Don't do alone, have great team.

MN In time in philanthropy, any shifts?

SWS So many changes, don't even know where to begin
Philanthropy is fickle
Growing Communities at Casey Foundation, early-mid 90's, all about CCI's [Community Change Initiatives]
Youth violence, voter registration, outcomes accountability
Actually stuck, actually agree with that
Now men and boys, organizational development - needs to stick

Philanthropy too fickle to be effective resource
Individual foundations, especially regional like ours, have to stay course
Want to look at systemic issues, see multiplier effect in terms of change Some philanthropies about charity, what feels good
Short-term needs, not long-term problem-solving
Governor wanted this to be about strategic systemic change

55 min

Fickleness of philanthropy is what it is
Well, something that can be done
Those that have power to change it, don't

National Committee for Responsible Philanthropy
I serve on the board, they do actually
About philanthropy being responsive most vulnerable communities, for transformative change
Up to local and regional foundations to have that mandate

We don't want us to behave like philanthropy
Now that is the world according to Sherece

MN Philanthropy as prestigious, how do you react?

SWS Answer in two tiers

When for real about social justice and change, this is very tough job
Very limited resources, isn't enough for systemic change we need

Not job for anybody who want to kick their feet up
I pray no one who has that heart ever gets this job
Don't have time for that bullcrap
Lives are too important
Tired of being 49th, 48th, 47th, and 45 in indicators for child and family success

Have article about worst places for poverty
Eight of ten are Southern states, third is Arkansas
Tired of it
If want to fund cutesy programs that make you feel good, I pray this organization never gets to that place

Is this prestigious or influential?
Don't know about prestige, not my gig

60 min

Influencing to make change in Arkansas, that's how I define it
I come every day saying, "How do we improve the lives of Arkansans?"
Building relationships, raising money, looking at strategy, deploying folks, moving agenda along

When have charity frame, philanthropy is place for you
If want to kick back, have lunch, play God over resources, knock yourself out
I have colleagues who do just that
Don't judge them, that's just not me

Don't walk around feeling prestigious or influential, just don't
Know of folk who do in my field

They say in philanthropy, everyone laughs at your jokes and is to happy to see you
Prayerfully that won't be the case because I have made such a difference, seen as a champion or advocate
They may not laugh at my jokes, I hope that I'm still relevant

I hope whoever listens to this in the future,
Not the time or place to get a job to be prestigious
This is the time to make change for Arkansas

Have to say no, stay steady
May see not any fruit for years
Don't waste my time, I'll be the first to attack you in the press and call you out because you are wasting resources
Too many people need this organization to play the role it plays

MN Shift to personal life. Helped raise sister's children, how influence views on family and marriage?

65 min

SWS Got deep on me now
Growing up, never wanted kids
Thought I would be abuser because of abuse I experienced
Didn't see point of children

Every now and again still don't get it, a lot of work

Would have to help with homework, talk to child
No one ever talked to me
Were so caught up in their own stuff – had legitimate stuff
Ain't faulting nobody, had stuff to take care of

Even today when someone says, "How are you?", don't know how to answer
Was raised, no one seemed to care what I felt, thought, or needed

What I learned from having Destiny and Simone, I could do kids
Requires a lot of care
Probably 38 by time they left my house
Never really saw myself as a person with children

Once saw point of marriage, that one I could do
To have a companion rest of your life, I can work with that

Weird events got me to that conclusion
Marriage straight up curiosity
Not nary one family member stayed married, or stayed successfully married All I saw, infidelity
and fighting
Could be whole series, crazy family stories

First time came across black folk married to same spouse and same set of kids, when started
working

Someone said, "Me and my husband such and such, celebrating our something anniversary"
"You've been married to the same man for 20-some odd years?"
She laughed, being black, knew what I meant
"You're probably the first person I've met who is married to same person, look like you're
enjoying it."

70 min

Started seeing men who wanted to go home to their wives
"Get out. Really? Are you serious?"
In late twenties
Ok, I can do that

Couple instances, in my mind come together
Cousin Joe long-term girlfriend Suzanne dissed at funeral for not being married to him

Witnessed debate on whether she could sit in front row, pick out suit
Whole thing because they weren't married
All the sudden want to get Christian
Remember saying to myself, "I need to get married".
Ain't no way going through all that with some man, debate whether get in obituary

I got sick one day, and I mean sick
Was home by myself, had to crawl to get to phone, call mother
Being alone, living alone is tad shortsighted
If you get sick, ain't nobody going to come
Might need to rethink this whole marriage and partnership thing

May sound very disparate, come together
Revelations about merits of being married that came to realize

At some point, open to marriage
Eventually met husband
Even marrying him was journey, met in 2000, didn't marry until 2012
He had to get himself together before I would marry him

Enjoy being married
Glad that I'm married now versus in my 20's or 30's
Pretty certain I'd be on my second or third marriage by now
Did not know what marriage was

75 min

Marriage to me was fussing and fighting, beating each other up
Did not work for my folk
Wasn't until became Christian, observing from others
I can do what it's supposed to be, not what I saw it to be
I believe I have that partner who can get me there

Glad I did it later
Actually two who I really liked a lot, I would have married
Glad I have who I have
His dreams and goals, we are able to marry together
Don't think I would have had that before, this works
I love you Joe!

MN Anything to add?

SWS Hope you can get out of it, feel like I rambled
Appreciate time to reflect
Happy to respond to whatever else
Thank you for opportunity

MN Thank you