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Mark R. Warren. 2010. Fire in the heart: How white activists embrace racial justice. Oxford University Press. 249 pp., (paperback),

ISBN: 978-0-19-975125-9

In the introduction to their recent special issue on *Intersecting Whiteness, Interdisciplinary Debates*, Steyn and Conway (2010) wrote, 'Illuminating whiteness invokes the question of what political or social strategy is needed to provoke change' (285). I would argue that scholars who study whiteness and anti-racism in particular raise this question, and many ask them in relation to their own work as well. One example of such questioning is the recent book by Harvard education professor Mark Warren, *Fire In The Heart* (2010). Warren's work has long explored community-building in the United States, and in this text he turns his attention to an underexplored community – white racial justice activists. He attempts to understand the identity processes that these activists undergo as they become fully committed to racial justice causes because, as he says, 'further progress in racial justice depends on many more white Americans coming to an understanding of racism and develop-

ing a commitment to take positive action' (1). In this book, Warren's research methods are shaped by questions surrounding his scholarly stance, while his presentation style is molded by issues of accessibility. In both realms, Warren is concerned with creating an intelligible account that does not betray his own commitment to racial justice. I would argue that for critical race scholars, including those engaged in whiteness studies, Warren's book provides a compelling example of a racially just methodology put to practice. At the heart of this methodology are concerns around respect for research 'subjects' and the accessibility of scholarly ideas.

In *Fire*, Warren develops what he calls a 'head, heart, and hand' (212) model to explain some whites' deepening commitment to racial justice. In this model, the head represents individuals' knowledge of racism, the heart represents ethics and emotion, and the hands represent white individuals' relationship-building and activism (214-15). These

three aspects build off each other to deepen white individuals' commitment to racial justice. Warren found that, 'moral concerns [i.e. the 'heart'] [...] play a key role in the development of commitment and action' for white activists (216). Nearly all of the activists in his study began their journey of racial justice activism through what Warren terms a 'seminal experience' (27) that produced a 'moral shock' for the individual (32). From here, white activists generally began to build relationships with people of color, which further taught them about racism and personalized these lessons. Eventually, though, most of the white activists began to feel personally invested in racial justice – that it was not a commitment they made on behalf of people of color but for themselves, as well. They began to understand the stakes that white people have in racial justice, which often led them to work in white communities in attempts to envelop more whites into the cause (see chapter 5). These activists also strove to develop multiracial collaborations and used them to prefigure the kind of communities they hoped to create (see chapter 7). In the end, the white activists from Warren's study created new identities that revolved around their racial justice commitments. In this identity, Warren concluded, 'the head, heart, and hand are all engaged' (217).

Understanding his work as 'exploratory and largely inductive',

Warren used semi-structured interviews with fifty activists to gather information about this 'largely unexplored field of human endeavor' (10). Part oral history and part focused on the present, these roughly three-hour interviews examined both the individuals' development as racial justice advocates and the meaning they take from their development and work. The developmental process, Warren writes, allows us to appreciate racial justice commitment by whites as a process, instead of some simplistic, definitive response to a single event. Throughout, Warren focused on what he calls 'the told' and not 'the telling' (236), analysing what he understands to be the empirical content of his interviewees' narratives, rather than discursive practices within those narratives. He aimed to cautiously take his interviewees at their word while also remaining vigilant against the classic interview pitfalls (e.g. well-rehearsed stories). He strove to be respectful of his interviewees and their stories: 'People are the experts on the meaning they make of their own lives' (237).

Warren's sympathetic stance towards the white activists he studied is refreshing. Without romantics and wholly aware of the limitations of his methods, he challenges academics to consider the merits of broaching the usual distance between scholars and the individuals they study. Of course, rapport-building with those we are researching has long

been contested, but Warren's work engages deeper questions. For him, the question is not one of whether rapport-building improves research but of the ethics behind scholarly creations of the meaning of individuals' lives outside of a context of respect for and faith in these individuals.

Aside from his research methods, two aspects of the presentation of the book stood out as significant to the creation of a racially just methodology: the accessibility of the language (through storytelling) in *Fire In The Heart* and the placement of the methodology chapter at the book's end. These features create an approachable scholarly work, as Warren strives to tell the stories of white activists' lives and not strangle their voices. In describing how white activists learn about racism through relationships with people of colour, Warren tells of 'the power of stories' (64) and explains that these stories make an 'understanding of racial discrimination direct and real' (64). Fittingly, story-telling features strongly throughout the book. We learn a great deal about many of the activists – their childhoods, personal relationships, religious and moral foundations – quite often in their own words. For instance, Warren writes of Jim Capraro and his eye-witness narration of a violent white mob near his Chicago neighborhood opened the second chapter on 'seminal experiences' (23-25). Warren does not hurry to analyse his interviewees'

lives but rather gives considerable space for such stories. Aside from portraying a deep respect for these white activists, this also works to make real, even fleshy, the theoretical examination that follows the stories.

Warren opted to place his more detailed discussion of methodology at the book's end. Some methodological information was provided at the beginning of the book, for instance how Warren went about narrowing his focus, garnering participants, and shaping interview questions. Providing this much detail upfront, Warren wrote, 'will help readers interpret and consider the merits of this analysis'; yet he recognized that 'social scientists, students, and others may want to know more' (15). He then placed a comprehensive methodological discussion in an appendix. This section includes the more academic discussions around transcript coding, his research framework, and his rationale for employing qualitative methods. In my mind, Warren perfectly handled the tension between a desire to write an accessible work and a need to remain accountable to his academic base. Warren tries to neither completely relegate a methodological discussion to those he presumed would be interested, nor does he attempt the whole conversation in one place or one kind of language. Thus, in the end, the more technical conversation around methodology does not serve as a

point of alienation but rather becomes something into which readers may opt.

Though I applaud his efforts to write a widely readable work, I craved more discussion on the theoretical literature that informed Warren's work. Such discussion was not entirely absent. For instance, Warren went into some detail about what he referred to as the 'interest/altruist trap', the theoretical debates that try to capture activists' motivations (15-18). On the other hand, Warren's treatment of critical race literature largely addressed the persistence of institutional racism and 'white passivity' and left out any discussion of critical whiteness literature, including white identity development (Feagin 2001, Helms 1990, McKinney 2005, McIntyre 1997, Tatum 1992). Without engaging with this literature, *Fire* loses a valuable chance to provide insight into this underexplored area. For instance, researchers like Feagin (2001) and McKinney (2005) have argued that most whites in the U.S. 'infrequently[...]think directly and consciously about whiteness and what it entails' (Feagin 2005: xii). Warren's work, however, clearly qualifies this generalisation, as the whites in his study develop a commitment to racial justice through deep reflection on their racial identity. Warren's work could serve to complicate our understanding of white racial identity development(s), but it leaves out a discussion of literature on this de-

velopment.

On the whole, Warren's methodological and structural choices in *Fire in the Heart* point to a way forward for critical whiteness scholars (and others) as they/we try to create a racial justice ethic within the academy. For it is nothing new to study whiteness or white people. Many of us in the field, however, particularly postgraduates, often perceive ourselves as feeling our way through a dark room. Though lacking an explicit relationship to certain bodies of whiteness theory, Warren's work does begin to shed light on the kinds of methods we might use – fostering trust with research participants, writing in accessible language, and relegating intensely academic conversations – in the creation of broader, racially just methodologies in the study of whiteness.

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