

Living in the Tension

By Shelly Tochluk

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For many, spiritual and racial justice principles go hand in hand. Yet, although seemingly compatible, tensions often arise when people try to live out their associated values and strategies. Further, there are those who sit solidly on one side of either spirituality or advocacy and fail to see the connection between the two.

Spiritually-oriented people often say:

People focused on politics and social justice activism are angry, wounded, unhealthy individuals who sabotage their own efforts by using antagonistic and divisive language, including terms like oppression, privilege, and supremacy.

On the other hand, racial justice advocates often say:

People focused on their spirituality as part of their personal growth are trying to escape into transcendence or a false "kumbaya" experience and deny their ongoing role in continuing personal and institutional racism, privilege, and the reinforcement of an unjust status quo that operates through interlocking systems of oppression.

Why do these tensions matter?

There is a vast potential of untapped transformative power waiting to be released if activists and spiritual people of various racial backgrounds build and strengthen bridges between their differing principles and expectations.

How can this book help?

Each chapter tackles one tension-filled theme and asks: What happens if one side of the tension is ignored? How can a *both/and* approach allow spirituality and racial justice efforts to support one another?

Chapter 1: Transcendence and Race Consciousness
Chapter 2: Self-Acceptance and Self-Improvement
Chapter 3: Personal Healing and Political Action
Chapter 4: Common Humanity and Group Differences

Chapter 5: Belonging and Appropriation
Chapter 6: Inner Truth and Accountability

Living in the Tension brings a broad perspective and a "both/and" awareness to spiritual and racial justice concerns, two areas that matter greatly in contemporary life. This book will appeal to people of any faith tradition and social justice activists at work in any setting.

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Living in the Tension By Shelly Tochluk Bibliography

- Rank: #1077048 in Books
- Published on: 2016-04-14
- Original language: English
- Binding: Perfect Paperback
- 246 pages

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Editorial Review

Review
Living in the Tension explores the complex tension between spiritual practice and social action with thoughtfulness, nuance, and clarity. The book s many examples, questions, and useful suggestions will challenge your thinking and inspire your activism and are sure to provoke important conversations that we all need to have to participate effectively and sustainably in multiracial organizing for racial justice. --**Paul Kivel** educator, activist and author *Uprooting Racism* and *Living in the Shadow of the Cross.*

Our faith traditions have long played a vital role in speaking to the moral and social issues of the day, from the suffragist and abolitionist movements to the civil rights movement. Many communities of faith and faith leaders sense a yearning as well as a need to reinvigorate their role and provide a language that can speak to our deepest values and connect to contemporary issues. Shelly Tochluk invites you into welcome conversation about how we can reawaken our deepest moral traditions to promote inclusion, equity, and address fundamental questions of belonging that embrace our diversity and complexity. Her book will be helpful for all of us dealing with spirituality, race and social justice. --**john a powell** director, Haas Institute for a Fair and Inclusive Society, UC Berkeley; author, *Racing to Justice: Transforming Our Conceptions of Self and Other to Build an Inclusive Society*

With grace, poignancy and careful precision *Living in the Tension* makes it clear that racial justice work requires spirituality and spirituality requires racial justice work. In these beautiful and wise pages, white allies who have long-labored for the dream of beloved community will find new approaches to the dilemmas that can stymie effective spiritual activism. For those who are just coming awake to their complicity in white privilege and are eager to work for racial justice, this book offers inspiration and reliable guidance. Tochluk s personal candor carries us with her as she comes to deeper understandings of what is required to hold a both/and approach to otherwise intractable tensions. Her broad-ranging scholarship and her hands on experience are a winning combination, making this book a must-read for whites devoted to participating responsibly in the work of racial justice. --**Rebecca Parker** President Emerita and Professor Emerita, Starr King School for the Ministry

About the Author
Shelly Tochluk is the author of *Witnessing Whiteness: The Need to Talk About Race and How to Do It.* An educator, with a background in psychology, Shelly Tochluk spent ten years as a researcher, counselor, and teacher in California s public schools. She now trains teachers to work with Los Angeles diverse school population as Professor of Education at Mount Saint Mary s University - Los Angeles. Her personal dedication to confront issues of race developed first through her participation with UCLA s NCAA Division-1 All-American Track and Field 4X400 meter relay team and later through her inner city teaching experiences. She currently volunteers with AWARE-LA (Alliance of White Anti-Racists Everywhere-Los Angeles). With this group, she co-created and produces the Unmasking Whiteness - Summer Institute that leads white people into a deeper understanding of their personal relationship to race, white privilege, and systemic racism.

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