

# What we are working on...

- To name mental, emotional, material habits associated with privilege, which support ongoing oppression and may be invisible.
- To identify how privilege has affected the history and current understanding of “good” environmental behavior and beliefs.
- To recognize the importance of reflecting on one’s own positionality whenever we communicate. Positionality is important to consider in our beliefs, our stories, our arguments, etc.

# Readings We Completed

Last Time:

Clare, Eli. "Clearcut." in *Exile and Pride: Disability, Queerness, and Liberation*. Duke UP, 2015.

For Today:

Harper, Breeze. "Vegans of Color: Racialized Embodiment, and Problematics of the Exotic." In *Cultivating Food Justice: Race, Class, and Sustainability*, edited by Alison Hope Alkon and Julian Agyeman. MIT Press, 2011.

# Ways-In Writing Exercise

1. Start with the activist essay you brought to class today.
2. Take up a different lens or perspective than you had at first.
3. Ask 10 questions about what you've written so far.
4. Imagine posing those questions to someone else, for discussion. Write about the conversation that might take place.
5. How does your piece relate to what you have and have not experienced in your life, in your background? What about your topic might be beyond your understanding?

# Eli Clare

## **Danger of a Single Story about Disability:**

“The dominant story about disability should be about ableism, not the inspirational supercrip crap or the believe-it-or-not disability story” (3).

“I use the word *disabled* as an adjective to name what this ableist world does to us...” (83).

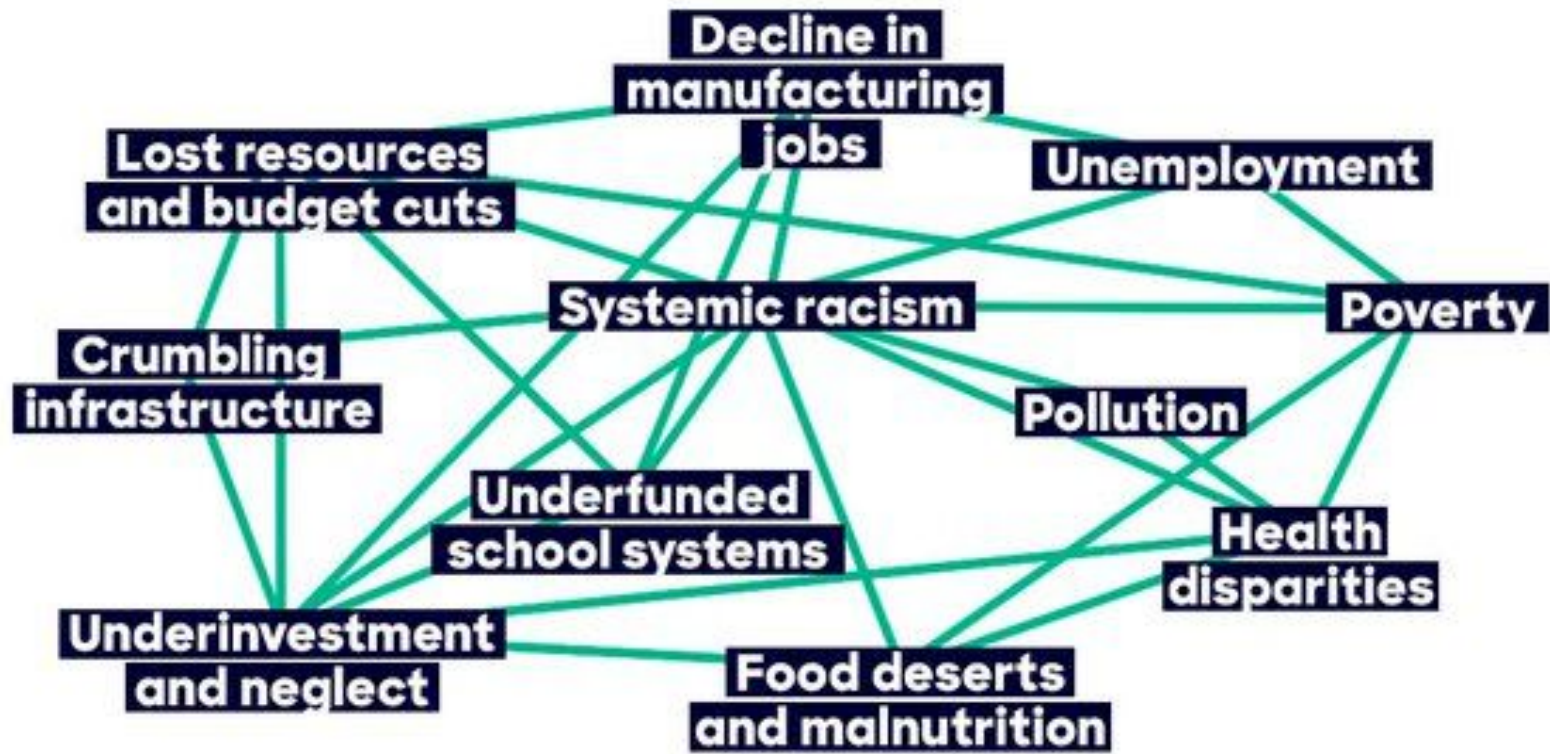
“Shouldn’t I call non-disabled people *enabled*?” (82).

## **Danger of a Single Story about Logging:**

“Rather than believing that loggers are murderers...pure and simple, maybe you place loggers...as the quintessential exploited worker in a capitalist economy. [...] Make no mistake: there is nothing romantic about logging. It is dangerous work, fraught with hazards that can tear bodies apart” (58).

“Who is going to save the logger? If we as a county are finally deciding...to save the spotted owl and fragments of its habitat, then we as a people need to be accountable to the folks who will be unemployed, possibly homeless and hungry, because of that decision. To turn away from this is to act as if loggers and logging communities are more complicit with environmental destruction than the rest of us” (61).

# Oppressive forces are interconnected





[Uprooting White Fragility](#)

[Human Rights Are Animal Rights](#)

As we listen to these talks, chart the connections between oppressive forces that Dr. Breeze Harper explicates.



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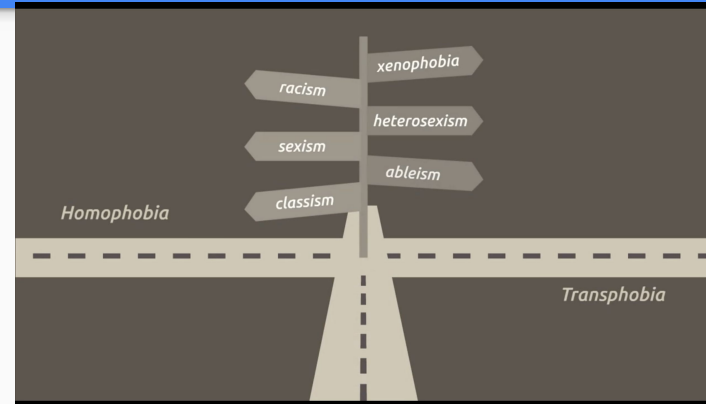


# What Is “Intersectionality”?

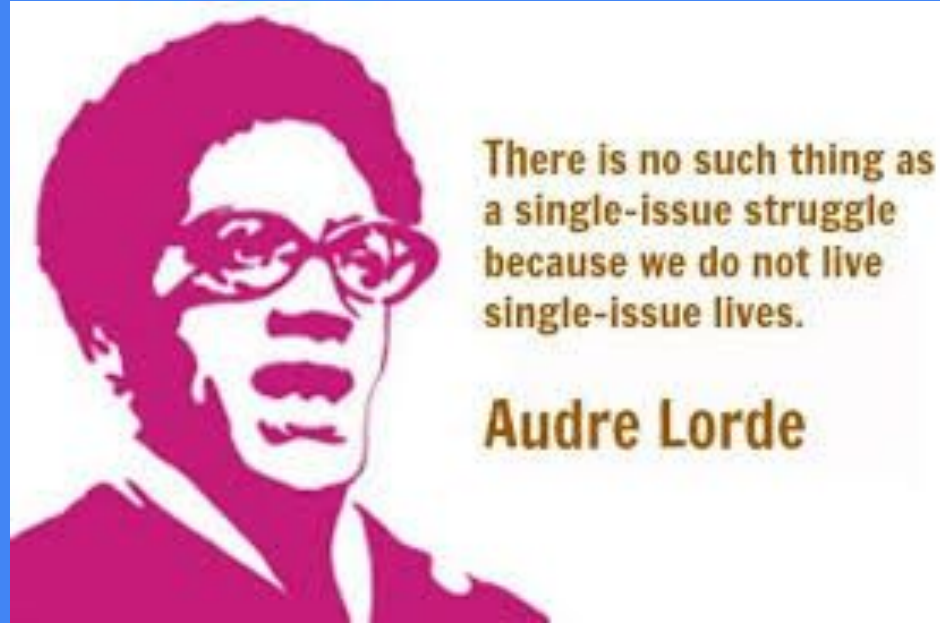
“When it comes to social inequality, people’s lives and the organization of power in a given society are better understood as being shaped not by a single axis of social division, be it race or gender or class, but by **many axes that work together and influence each other.**”

Intersectionality as an analytic tool gives people better access to the **complexity** of the world and of themselves.”

—Patricia Hill Collins and Sirma Bilge, *Intersectionality*



Intersectionality is about asking the question: **How does each axis of oppression operate here?** It means also being receptive and responsive to the answer.



# Intersecting Axes of Privilege, Domination, and Oppression

Adapted from Kathryn Pauly Morgan, "Describing the Emperor's New Clothes: Three Myths of Educational (In)Equality,"

The Gender Question in Education: Theory, Pedagogy & Politics, Ann Diller et al., Boulder, CO: Westview, 1996.

Adapted and edited by IsaJennie

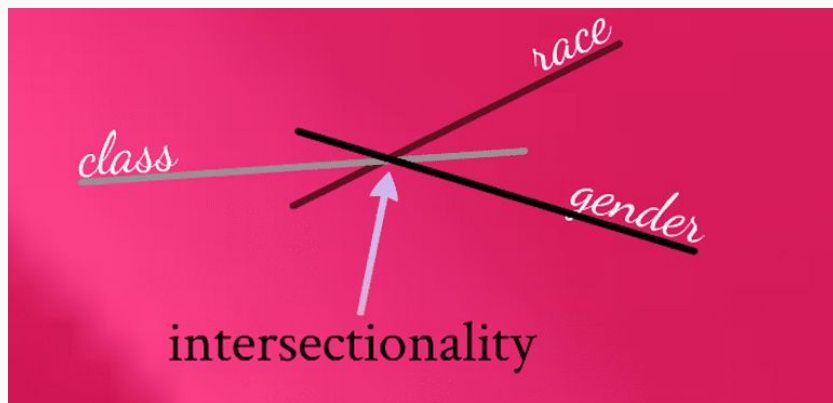




When feminism does not explicitly oppose racism, and when antiracism does not incorporate opposition to patriarchy, race and gender politics often end up being antagonistic to each other and both interests lose.

— Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw —

AZ QUOTES



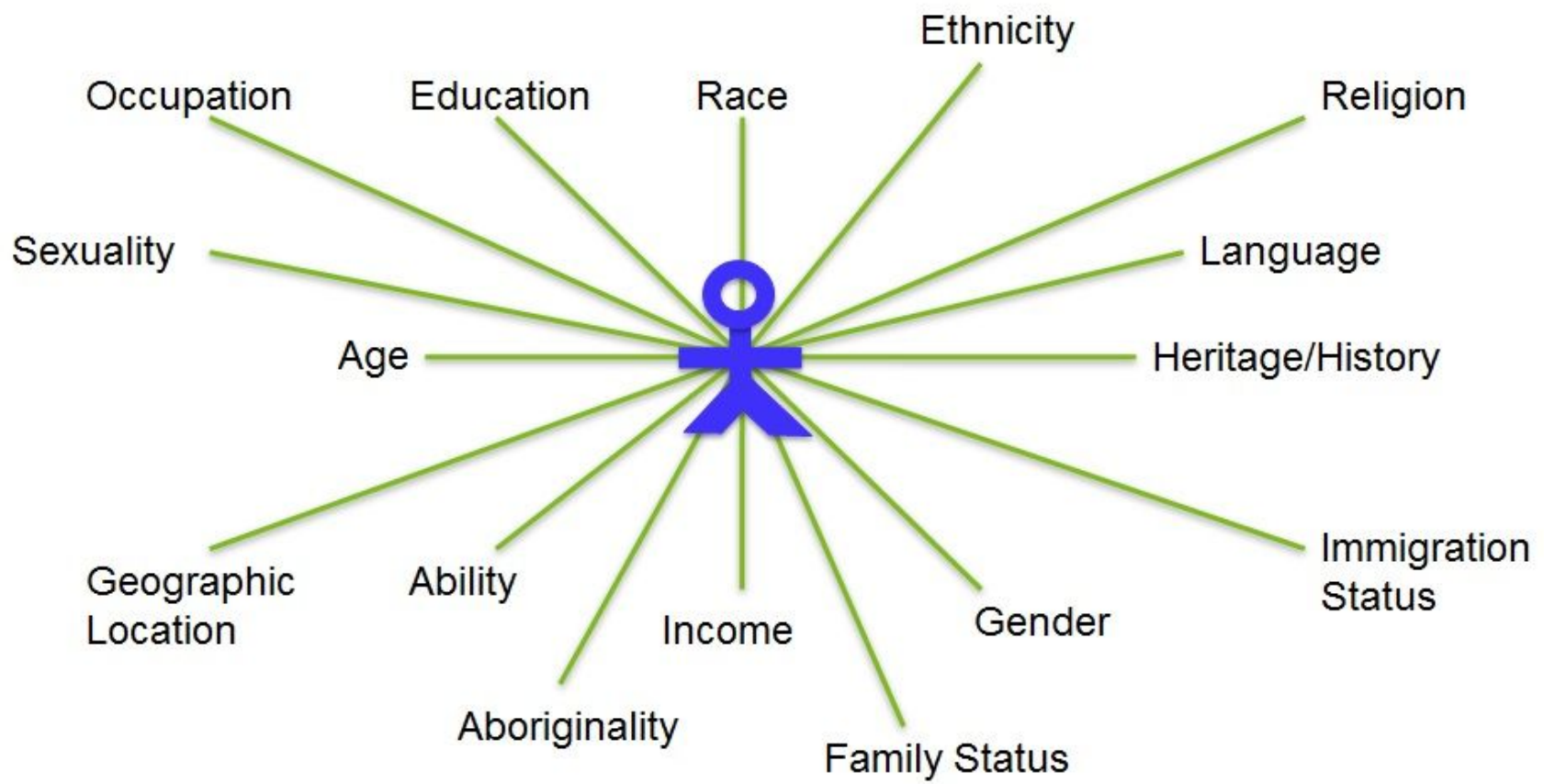
Our position  
in relation to  
these axes is  
likely to  
shape our  
worldview.

## Intersecting Axes of Privilege, Domination, and Oppression

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# Positionality - Who You Are In Social, Historical, Political, and Ecological Context



# Knapsack Exercise

What do you think this tool is  
meant to provide?

If a statement in this list were  
true of you, what might you  
be predisposed to believe or  
assume?



My views of systemic racism, the process of racialization, white privilege, etc. have all developed a lot in the last two years . . . I simply feel an obligation to continue to listen to and learn from the voices and experiences of people of color, and to question other white people when they are doing or saying something that seems to come from a place of white privilege. . . .

I don't think it's impossible for people of color to feel comfortable in white-lead movements/spaces . . . Rather, I think there is a fundamental difference between asking "How can we get more POC involved here?" (which maintains the idea that whites are in control of the movement and that that is somehow natural or unproblematic and not really a big deal) and asking "What are we doing that makes this issue seem irrelevant or off-putting to POC? How can we change that?"

Claire provides a good example of what antiracist consciousness among white identified vegans can look like.



# Your Personal Reactions to the Knapsack Exercise

(Thanks to Dr. Sarah Ray for these prompts.)

Pick three statements from the knapsack exercise that did any of the following:

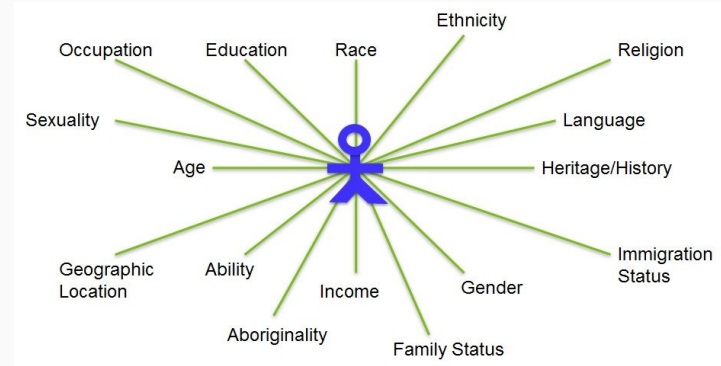
- Surprised you or confused you (perhaps regarding why they were on the list);
- Revealed something about your own identity and life story (positionality, path, past, privilege) that you don't often think about;
- Speak to or validate your own experience with environmentalist ideas.

# Take-Away Ideas from the Knapsack Exercise

Our views are reflections of the worlds we have lived in.

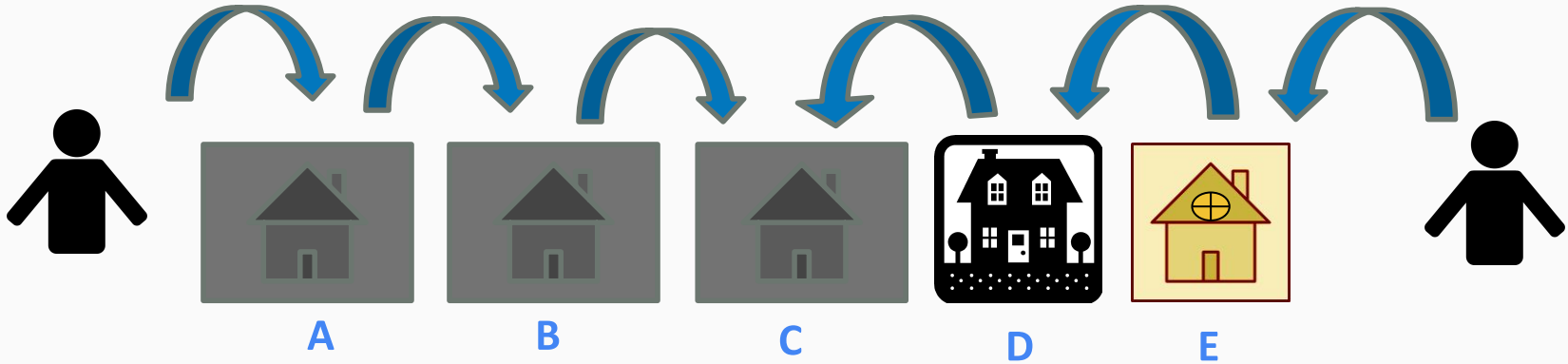
...Our views can also change.

**What has your own positionality led you to believe about the topic you're engaging in the essay you've started?**



*Listing on the board: beliefs appearing in our essays*

# FIVE HOUSES





What we want in our writing:

- Seeking difference in a way that is honoring and not appropriative
- Identifying how power operates in centering some experiences and excluding others

**What does this look like in practice?**

# What is the point of the knapsack exercise?

- We all have what Gloria Anzaldúa calls “blank-spots.”
- That’s why we need to keep ourselves in conversation. That’s why we need to keep learning, and seeking our perspectives different from our own.
- In deepened self-reflection we can find deepened connection.

Think of a time when you recognized the limitations of your lens or your worldview. Maybe you'll think of a time when you overlooked a harm or didn't understand what someone else was experiencing. How did you come to understand what you didn't at first see?

Think of a time when you helped another person to see the limitations of their lens of worldview. How did you approach the communication with this person?

# What needs to be present for one to be receptive to being 'called out' or 'called in'?

## Receptiveness versus defensiveness

- Letting go of perfectionism
- Self-acceptance, self-forgiveness
- Mindfulness: 'what is showing up for me?'
- Humility: knowing I don't have all the answers
- Empathy & eagerness to listen to another without demand (a gift shared)
- A learner's orientation / growth mindset
- Believing that it's valuable and necessary to be uncomfortable
- Understanding that ideas are 'in the air'. We receive problematic ideas from our world. But we can, with effort, change how we think.

Do the best you can until you know better. Then when you know better, do better.

- Maya Angelou

(Sounds like our classroom community agreements...)

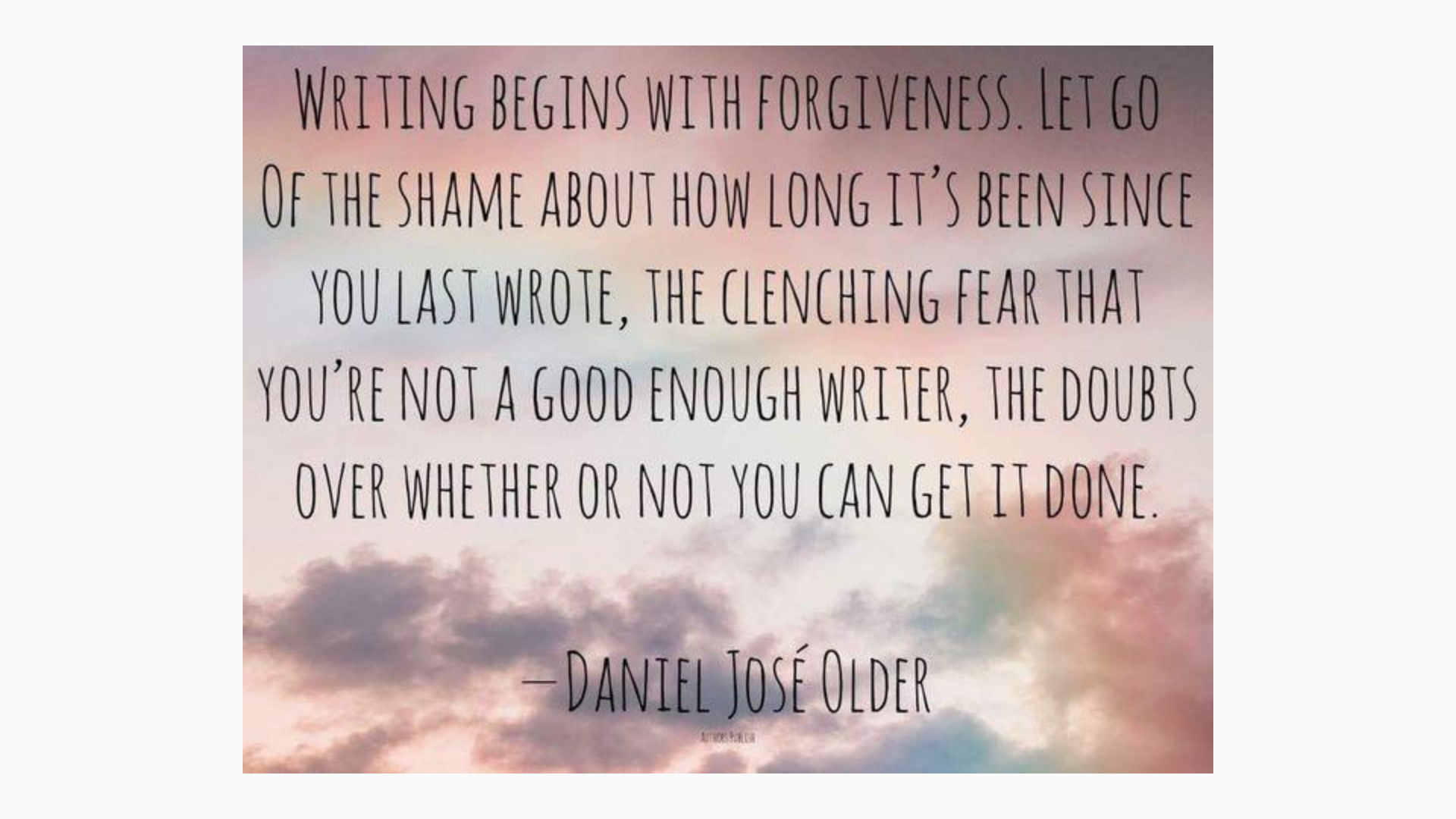
Moving past white shame: "To acknowledge one's privilege is not a moral condemnation. Rather, it is a call to action that requires collective work in order to evenly distribute access to power and to resources so that human agency can be reclaimed and claimed by all. Our intention is not to inspire guilt but to inspire action."

"I'm not interested in anybody's guilt. Guilt is a luxury that we can no longer afford. I know you didn't do it, and I didn't do it either, but I am responsible for it because I am a man and a citizen of this country and you are responsible for it, for the very same reason." - James Baldwin





# Part 2



WRITING BEGINS WITH FORGIVENESS. LET GO  
OF THE SHAME ABOUT HOW LONG IT'S BEEN SINCE  
YOU LAST WROTE, THE CLENCHING FEAR THAT  
YOU'RE NOT A GOOD ENOUGH WRITER, THE DOUBTS  
OVER WHETHER OR NOT YOU CAN GET IT DONE.

— DANIEL JOSÉ OLDER

Checking in: our  
daily writing  
practice

Sharing in our round  
table

What discoveries  
are you making  
about your  
processes and  
practices  
as a writer?

## Opening writing prompt

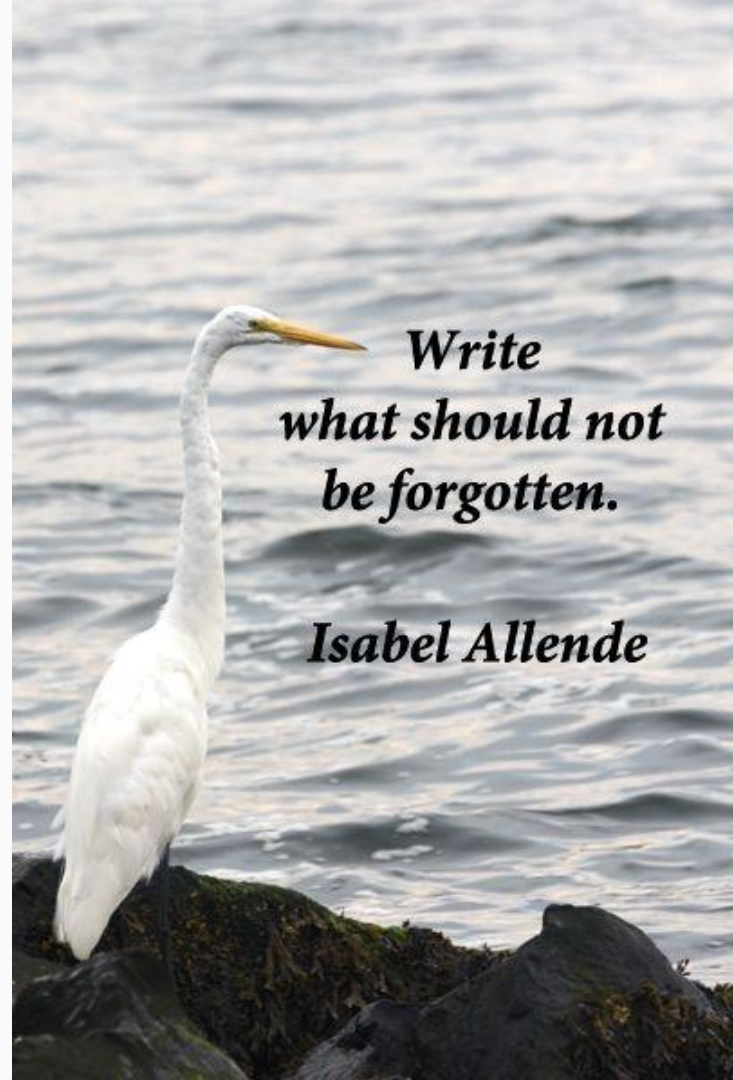
(you're invited to add this to the draft you brought to class today)

### ***Reflect:***

What does your essay need from you?

Who are you in your essay?

What about your background influences your approach to your essay?



***Write  
what should not  
be forgotten.***

***Isabel Allende***

# Developing a Lens for Your Lens

Figure 4: Frames of Reference (illustration by Andrea O'Brian)

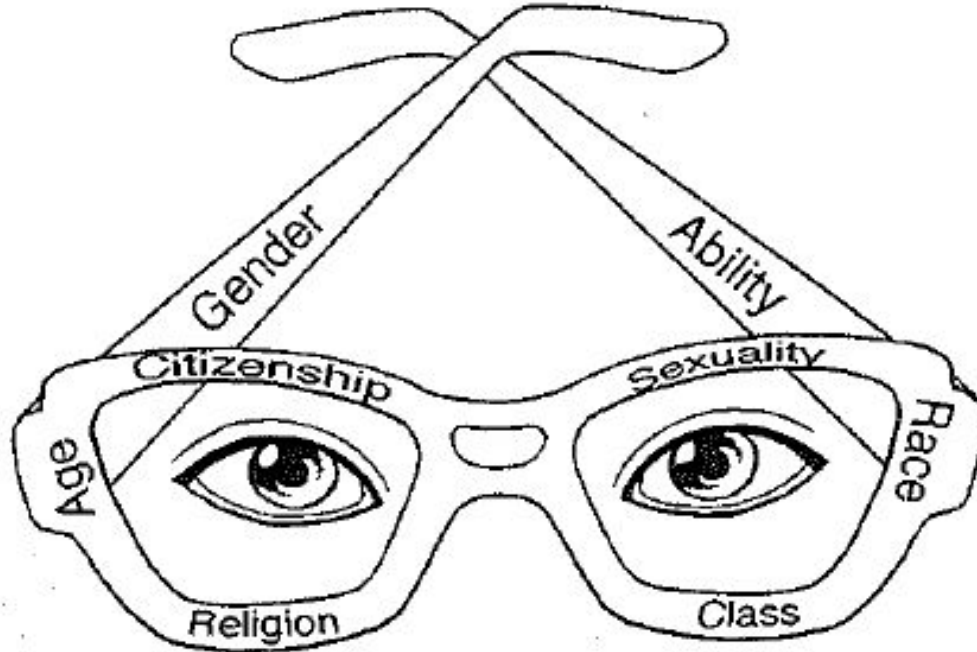


Image from Robin DiAngelo, *What Does It Mean to Be White?*

# Eli Clare: Positionality

My body is “[a] body of white, rural, working-class value. I still feel an allegiance to this body, even as I reject the virulent racism, the unexamined destruction of forest and river” (11)

# How Clare Acknowledges Positionality

*From your reading response quiz:*

Clare references the worldviews he learned as a child as specifically "white" and "Western." (For example, the words "In the white, Western worldview that I learned as a child..." start the section on page 22.)

Why is it important to explicitly name these understandings as "white" and "Western"?

**The book *Exile and Pride* opens with a discussion of Clare's positionality.** The chapter is titled "A Note about Gender, or Why Is This White Guy Writing about Being a Lesbian?" He writes,

Over the last decade in my continued process of reading, I've chosen to slide across some gender line. The process is most commonly understood as gender transition, but I've experience it less as one discrete transition from woman to man than as a long meandering slide. Today I live in the world as a man, even while my internal sense of gender is as a genderqueer, neither man nor woman. At the same time, I have no desire to abandon or disown my long history as a girl, a tomboy, a dyke, a woman, a butch.

In many trans and queer communities today, my particular gendered story is not all that unusual. But other those communities, the reality of a white guy have a long, prideful lesbian past can be totally disorienting. Rather than explain myself in the face of cultural confusion, anger, and/or hatred, I yearn for the day when all the rules that confine and constrain gender, that punish gender transgression--rules shaped by misogyny, transphobia, homophobia, and shaped again by white supremacy, capitalism, ableism--come crashing down. I want my gendered story to be one of many stories that defy, bend, smash the gender binary. But in the end, what I really want is for all the many gendered possibilities in the world to be, not normal, but rather profoundly ordinary and familiar.



## PREFACE

### The Making of a Chicana Ecocritic

**P**OPULAR IMAGINATION associates environmental writers and environmental literary critics with a life spent hiking mountain trails, kayaking through rapids, or living off the grid. Yet I was born in the ninth most populous area in the United States (Dallas, Texas), and I attended graduate school first in Los Angeles and then in Houston during the late 1990s and early 2000s, when the two competed for the title of city with the most polluted air. My wilderness experience is best described as slim to none, and the first time the environmental movement caught my attention was in 1990 during the twentieth anniversary revival of Earth Day. I was seventeen years old at the time, and Earth Day seemed like a good idea to me, but I couldn't imagine how I might fit into the movement. My family moved to a little town in north Texas when I was four years old, but I never equated my rural life with any kind of environmental experience.

For one, my parents never took us tent camping or hiking when my brother and I were growing up. My father's childhood experience as a Mexican American migrant farmworker, traveling the seasons from Texas to the Midwest and back during the Great Depression, living in tents from necessity, taught him to see camping and hiking as hardships. The only "hiking" he ever saw was of the hitchhiking variety, by need rather than by choice. His graduation from day laborer with no job security to a solid blue-collar career as a truck driver for Affiliated Food Stores gave our family a decidedly motor-oriented lifestyle. My mother regards rural agricultural areas as

## POSITIONALITY

Core Concept: There is no such thing as an “objective” stance. **Our understanding of the world is conditioned** by the identities, contexts, experiences, and perspectives we inhabit. **Self-reflexivity is important.**

Transparently grappling with issues of power and privilege is an important way of building your ethos in a piece of writing.

# Review: Discussion of Positionality

As we flip through the slides we used to discuss positionality, write on a notecard two things, on the two sides of the notecard. Do include your name.

1. Side 1: What does positionality mean to you, as a writer?
2. Side 2: What would you like to learn more about?

Looking at the creative nonfiction essays you've started so far, think about...

Activist writing doesn't mean "preachy" writing....

- We can cause readers to see the world differently without saying "this is how it is" or "this is all there is" (the single story).
- We can reflect on our positionality—what it means for us to be writing what we write. We can actively work on our "blankspots."
- We can make an argument without reducing the complexity of an issue.

Look at the essays you've written so far:

- To what extent do your essays fall into the "dangers of a single story"?
- To what extent do your essays demonstrate cultural humility?
- To what extent do your essays acknowledge the complexity of an issue?