

Appendix | America's Cultural Production Centers & The Shalom of God

On the linked pages from *The Atlantic Monthly* (April 2011), is a demographic map intended to describe the divisions within the United States based on economic, cultural, and political data. Through this process, the map categorizes the nation's 3,141 counties into 12 statistically distinct "types of place."

The significance of a map such as this aids us in our church planting efforts because this helps to identify the most influential communities in the arena of cultural creation. If we hope, pray, and seek to see the world transformed through the gospel of Jesus Christ, identifying these pivotal contexts—where the "elite gatekeepers" of our culture live and collaborate in the creation and dissemination of ideas, artifacts, and goods—then becomes a critical operation in the process of church planting strategy.¹ In this strategy, we should be drawn primarily to the areas of Kelly Green, "Campus and Careers," Dark Green, "Industrial Metropolises," and several of the Lighter Green, "Monied Burbs," areas. These few small areas of the country are where our major research universities, corporations, media and technology empires, artistic centers, and publishing houses reside. These are some of the gatekeeping institutions that the Church must seek to thoughtfully participate in if we hope to see the world change through the expansion of the Kingdom of God.

This is not to say that church planting and ministry efforts should not be happening in the other 3,000 or so counties in the U.S., the Church must be a *faithful presence* in all places; yet, to bring the gospel to bear in a large scale, world-transforming way, we must seek to engage the elite centers of American culture on their own terms with *strategic intentionality*. This requires the Church to identify, train, and resource those leaders who can collaboratively enter into these halls of power; who can produce ideas, artifacts, and goods at the same level as the elite; who can collaboratively challenge the cultural *status quo*, and through the cultural capital produced as well as the patient process of relational evangelism, can bring about a redemptive shift within the very center of cultural production; and, who can also lead and teach the Church throughout this process.

All of this does not look like the church or individual Christians seizing the reins of political, economic, ideological, or cultural power; rather, this requires of the Christian in community to follow the pattern of Jesus, in reliance on the Holy Spirit, as we enter into these relational networks embodying the role of the Servant, with the intent to Sacrifice our own desires and comforts, in order to see Shalom (gospel reconciliation) come to the people and institutions we share relationship with.

I believe what some of this calls for is a breed of church planter that has all of the customary requisites: gifting, skills, and calling for entrepreneurial gospel ministry; yet, has also shown capacity, desire, and fit to engage with those in these hubs of culture. This also calls for a new kind of church, one that has been in development for some time.

¹ Cf. James Davison Hunter, *To Change the World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p41; here he asserts, "the work of world-making and world-changing are, by and large, the work of elites: gatekeepers who provide creative direction and management within spheres of social life." Hunter goes on to show that, although Christians may have the correct "worldview," we lack significant influence in culture, "...because they have been absent from the arenas in which the greatest influence in the culture is exerted," (p89). This is a helpful sociological elucidation of Francis Schaeffer's "Line of Despair" thesis, cf. Francis Schaeffer, *The God Who Is There* (Westchester, IL: Crossway, 1990), 8.