

Chapter Thirteen — White Americans Have Had More

Complete Access to the American Dream

Because of the packages of instinctive behaviors that are outlined in this book, it has been a very good thing to be a White American for a very long time.

White Americans have benefited from the full protection of the laws. White Americans have been able to move freely, intermarry freely, and seek both economic and political advancement as a member of the dominant American Us.

Equal opportunity for White Americans has tended to be real — and people who are White Americans have had direct access to the American Dream at multiple levels.

All of the best features of this country have been available to the White Americans who want to work hard and who choose to take advantage of those opportunities. Advancement for White Americans isn't guaranteed, but racial or ethnic barriers to advancement do not exist for White Americans.

The intergroup behavior patterns that exist in this country that have favored White Americans over other Americans are long standing and those

discriminatory patterns are pretty clear. They are extremely clear to the people from each of those minority groups who have been adversely affected by those behaviors.

Those advantages have actually been much less visible to White Americans because it tends to be much harder to perceive an advantage than it is to perceive a barrier.

The advantage patterns have been consistent and they have been obvious. White people in this country have tended to be the people who have had the highest-level jobs. White males have the very highest salary levels in most settings.

Promotions in many settings have historically been significantly easier for White Americans. Promotions have particularly favored White males.

In many settings, basic promotions to top jobs never happen for either women or minority Americans. In most other settings, those kinds of promotions for women and for minority Americans have been very rare.

Glass ceilings exist and the data we can all see about who is in what jobs prove that those glass ceilings exist in some form for those jobs.

Schools and educational opportunities have tended to favor White Americans. That was true centuries ago and it continues to be true today.

Political opportunities have also tended to favor White Americans — but that is no longer an absolute fact of political reality. We are much more inclusive politically today, but all groups in this country know how recent that progress is.

Most political positions and group-based power levels have been held by White male Americans for the entire course of our political history. Again — the historical data about actual office holders proves beyond debate that those patterns have been the reality of our lives.

The basic patterns in all of those areas are clear and have been very clear for a very long time. We have a significant number of people in various minority groups who are each a part of the economic and social fabric of the country whose groups have been discriminated against historically and who — to at least some degree — are still being discriminated against today individually and by group by not being part of the White majority and by not being a White male.

White Americans often have a very hard time either believing that discrimination exists or seeing that discrimination to be a reality because the discrimination has not been directed against White Americans.

That discrimination is invisible to most White Americans. It just “felt right” to White Americans to be in the key jobs. It felt earned and it felt normal to White Americans to have those resources and to have that level of relative power.

It felt normal because it was normal. That particular pattern has very clearly been the norm. That fact made that pattern invisible to White Americans, but not to everyone else. Those particular patterns are very clear to everyone else in the country.

Everyone else who has directly felt those problems and who has experienced that discrimination directly in their own lives and for their own family members either directly or indirectly as a result of being in any of our minority groups knows what those issues are and knows very clearly what that history has been.

Some Of The Discrimination Patterns Are Changing

There are an increasing number of situations today where hiring decisions are being made in ways that favor non-White job candidates. A number of processes are being put in place to increase the diversity levels for our higher education positions and for our job markets.

Some of those new processes favor the admissions of minority candidates or the hiring and promotion of minority or female employees. Those efforts to favor those decisions are intended to change the patterns that have been our norm.

That situational “reverse discrimination” has been more visible to some White Americans than discrimination ever was and it is generating some negative responses from some White Americans in some settings. That whole set of circumstances is functionally a relatively new development.

The experiences of being discriminated against in any setting create its own reality for everyone who faces that discrimination. Discrimination is important and it is very real to the person who is facing the discrimination.

Not being discriminated against, however, doesn’t create that same reality or have that same personal impact.

That creates part of the reality that we need to deal with today as we wrestle with those issues for our country. We all need to understand that discrimination tends to be invisible and unfelt to someone who hasn’t been discriminated against and very visible to anyone who was discriminated against. Those are clearly very different perspectives and experiences. We need to understand and be aware of both of Them.

People from various groups think differently about this country based on their own personal experience and their own personal perspective and based on the direct and personal experiences of other people they care about.

Looking Different and Sounding Different Triggers Us/Them

Alarms And Instincts At A Core Level

Before we go forward to eliminate those levels of discrimination in the future, we need to collectively understand what the actual basic factors are that have kept so many people from doing well in our past.

Discrimination clearly happened. That is beyond dispute. What has not been as clear is why the specific discrimination that has happened has happened.

If we are going to base our future strategy for success on including more people in the American Dream, we do need to understand clearly at this point in our history why we have excluded so many people from inclusion in the American Dream and we need to understand clearly why the sets of people who were excluded were excluded.

One reality that we need to understand is that our instincts have created those barriers. We did not realize as a nation or as individuals that our instincts were having that impact on us in so many interpersonal and

functional areas, but the truth is that our instincts have caused our country to do damaging things to many people based on those instincts.

We need to understand the specific sets of instincts that have caused those behaviors to happen.

“Sight And Sound” Have Triggered Us/Them Instincts

Knowledge is power. We now know the answer to that question. We now understand that the specific sets of instincts that have created those levels of differentiation tend to be triggered for each of us and for all of us at a very primal level by two key factors — sight and sound.

Those two very basic and simple delineation factors sit at the core, root and foundation of our discriminatory patterns of behavior as a nation.

It seems too simple to be true. But the sad truth is that any set of people who have has looked or who has sounded different than the White majority group in American has triggered us/them instincts in the White Americans who have been running the country.

White Americans have accepted other White Americans who looked like White Americans and who sounded like White Americans to be the American Us. White Americans have simultaneously triggered entirely

instinctive and functionally negative differentiation approaches and patterns for any people who did not look or sound like the American Us.

We did not know that those particular differentiating instinctive delineation processes have been affecting our thoughts and behaviors to the extent that they do affect them. We did not know that those two basic triggers were so powerful. But the truth is that those differentiation factors do exist and the packages of instincts that have been triggered by those factors have sculpted group behaviors in every intergroup setting going back to the foundation of our country.

The consequences of having those specific factors trigger those packages of instincts for all of those years have been the patterns of discrimination and the consistent intergroup prejudice levels that have been directed against all of those sets of people in our country for all of that time. The patterns are consistent and they are actually painfully easy to see once we look for them. White Americans have discriminated against any groups who looked or sounded different than the White majority group who spoke English as their group language.

To make progress today, and to avoid future levels of both conscious and unconscious bias and discrimination, we all need to understand clearly exactly how that particular differentiation process has worked in the past and

we need to make the intellectual decision to set those factors aside as we build a sense of American us for the future.

Those old delineation patterns were very basic. They were visual and they were auditory. All people have the programming to respond to those factors. In any setting, people tend to instinctively perceive any people in that setting who sound like us to be us. People also perceive anyone who looks like us to be “Us.”

People also perceive other people in any setting to be “them” if the other people in that setting do not look like us or sound like us.

Looking different triggers basic us/them alert systems. Sounding different also triggers basic us/them alert systems. We use both of those differentiation factors to figure out who is them and who is us.

When you boil our overall patterns of intergroup discrimination down to their most basic and consistent levels, those two very direct factors trigger our internal, very basic instinctive perceptions of other people. Sight and sound are the two core triggers that have given us our long-standing and overarching negative patterns of intergroup behavior as a country.

Tiny Babies Differentiate On Sight And Sound

The process starts very early in our lives.

Some recent brain wave scanning tests have shown that even very tiny infants — hours old — can actually have different brain waves if someone doesn't sound like their “us” or if someone doesn't look like their “us.”

The tiny babies aren't afraid, but their brains do clearly register those both kinds of visual and audible difference in people very early in their lives — literally when the babies are only minutes old.

That set of us/them triggers seems too simple to be true, but it is true. Sight and sound has triggered major packages of instincts and instinctive behaviors for us as a country. The consequences of all of those centuries of discriminatory behavior in this country against the people in this country who do not look like or did not sound exactly like the White majority group “us” has created centuries of discriminatory behaviors against those sets of people.

Every Group That Looks Different Or Sounds Different Has Experienced Discrimination

The consistency of that very simple discrimination pattern has been absolute. Our history proves that process to be real. Relevant and real.

Every group in this country that has either looked different or sounded different has faced discrimination.

The absolute consistency of those behaviors in all of those settings for all of that time looks very much like there might have been some multi-century level of macro conspiracy in place that has existed in this country specifically to achieve those basic discriminatory goals for all of those years.

That package of consistent negative behaviors against those groups of people was not a conspiracy. It was all triggered by a set of instincts that created basic consequences and teed up consistent basic behavior patterns that looked like a conspiracy against anyone who looked or sounded different than the majority “us.”

The pattern of behavior was clear. Anyone who looked and sounded like the White majority “us” was accepted as an “us” and anyone who looked different or sounded different than the white “us” has tended to be treated as a “Them.”

The Behavior Is Instinctive — Not Conspiratorial

All of the consistently negative intergroup behavior we have seen from the first days as a country truly does look like a deliberate and conscious conspiracy. It is not a conspiracy. It is all actually simply the result of a set of almost painfully simple instincts.

Some people do believe in the existence of a very specific macro conspiracy of that nature for this country. That issue was addressed earlier in this book and in more detail in both *Cusp of Chaos* and *The Art of InterGroup Peace*. If there actually was an explicit racist or ethnic conspiracy that created all of those consistent negative behaviors, someone from the other side would have found the various conspiratorial tool kits that were used and involved in that explicit conspiracy long ago and shared them with the world.

If those conspiratorial documents existed, then the tools used to perpetuate and communicate that conspiracy to all of those settings would have been discovered by someone somewhere — and the people who found them would have exposed those tools of that conspiracy to the light of day.

That exposure of either the functional conspiratorial tool kit for those sets of behaviors — or exposure in some way of the conspiracy itself hasn't happened at any point in our history because those consistent discrimination consequences that look so conspiratorial were not created by an actual set of conspiratorial tools.

Quite a few people do believe, however, that there is an actual conspiracy at the root of that damaging consistency to do racist things.

A number of other people believe and say that there is an equally powerful sexist and misogynistic conspiracy that exists to do a range of intentionally negative things to women.

Some people who hold that belief about the existence of a misogynistic conspiracy believe that men of all races and all cultures also somehow conspire in a similar overall conspiratorial way to oppress women.

It is absolutely true that consistent discrimination against women does exist.

The addendum to this book discusses those misogynistic and discriminatory behaviors relative to women in some detail. Discrimination clearly happens. But we do not have an actual conspiracy by mobs in this country to cause that set of negative things to happen to women. That set of behaviors that are problematic to women does not exist as a conspiracy.

Some people believe that all of those negative behavior patterns toward women also have some level of functional conspiracy by males at their core. There definitely are relevant and problematic instincts that do exist relative to women — but there is no overall actual conspiracy that functionally persuades fashion magazines, for example, to create advertisements that intentionally undermine women. There is not a

functional conspiracy to make women feel bad about their bodies or to create and campaigns that undermine the self-image of women.

There are no conspirators who choreograph those messages or who coordinate those sets of issues for all of our communications media and all of the advertising programs that are aimed at women. Other factors that are activated in instinctive behaviors create those sets of ads — and create the reaction to those ads.

The likelihood that anyone could organize our advertising and fashion executives and practitioners to do anything in a coordinated and organized way is very low — given who actually does that work in those settings.

Real Conspiracies Do Exist

Our cultures have a very powerful impact on our thinking relative to how we look and what we wear at any given point in time. The people who shape and influence our cultures in those areas have their own set of creative and competitive reasons for the fashions and expectations they create — but those reasons do not include intellectual and operational steering given to those people by any set of core conspirators.

Fashion has its own dictators and we all tend to flow with the dictates that exist for our own relevant culture at any given point in time.

That is not a conspiratorial process.

That belief that those consistent and universal negative intergroup behaviors and even intergender behaviors are driven primarily by our basic instincts and by various cultural influences and not by an actual macro conspiracy does not mean, of course, that real and relevant conspiracies do not exist. Real conspiracies actually do exist.

The conspiracies that do exist relative to those issues tend to be more situational and they tend to be more local. It is true that real racist, sexist, and prejudicial conspiracies do happen in many settings — and those local conspiracies can cause real damage to people when they happen.

People who have their own intergroup thought processes driven in negative ways by instinctive values and instinctive goals do conspire with one another in various settings to damage other people in consistent ways.

Within our overall behavior patterns that stem from our us/them behaviors, there have actually been many local, specific, and very often situational conspiracies that have been used in various intergroup settings to achieve various very intentional and very deliberate discriminatory goals.

But there has not been a formal overarching conspiracy for the entire country and there is not a macro world-wide conspiracy for the “White race”

that has created that consistency of discriminatory behaviors and all of those situational intergroup conspiracies in so many settings.

For those issues related to gender preference discrimination, there have been clear sets of people who have organized in deliberate ways to create barriers to people through the law and culture of expectations.

There have been issues in various communities where people have enacted laws relating to voting that can sometimes create discriminatory access to voting for subsets of the population.

In the past, those particular conspiracies existed at a minor level because they kept both women and minority Americans from being legally able to vote.

Those discriminatory behaviors were not secret. Those conspiracies could not have been more visible.

People Conspire Against People Who Do Not Look Like “Us”

Or Sound Like “Us”

The primary and most relevant key drivers for all of those negative behaviors in our own country have actually tended to be very basic. A very fundamental and basic instinctive reaction sat at the core of all of those prejudicial and discriminatory behaviors.

White Americans wrote the laws. White Americans have tended to believe that people who either don't look like "Us" or who do not sound like "Us" must be a "Them" and White Americans felt instinctively justified doing things that were negative to "Them."

Those two simple triggers created that sense of "Them." Anyone who did not look like us or sound like us must be a "Them."

Very simple and consistent us/them behaviors have failed the pattern set by those perceptions.

Because we Americans have not intellectually and cognitively known the extent to which our basic and primal instincts have been shaping our thinking and creating our values, very negative intergroup behaviors have happened in multiple ways and our instincts have made those negative behaviors feel very "right" to the people who were doing them.

That pattern has created extremely consistent patterns of "us/them" intergroup behaviors. Our cultures, in the service of our instincts, have created laws and expectations that have caused those instinctive perceptions to manifest themselves in very negative ways against each group that was perceived to be "Them."

We can actually fairly easily use our intellect and cultures to change those sets of behaviors. We can cause inclusive behaviors to feel right when we build those inclusive behaviors into our cultures and our paradigms for any setting.

We can also create laws and we can build intentionally enlightened cultural expectations that can channel us into less sexist and less racist behaviors.

Knowledge is power on that whole set of issues and reactions.

When we understand how those specific perceptual triggers work to channel our thinking, we can very intentionally and effectively teach ourselves not to let the way people look and the way people sound cause us to believe that people who look or sound different than “Us” are a “Them.”

Those instinctive perceptions had control over our thinking because we did not know they existed — and it simply “felt normal” for us to perceive groups in that way and act accordingly. We can use our cultures to change our expected behaviors in those areas — and once we change behavioral expectations and change behaviors, the new behaviors will be the ones that feel normal.

We Need To Embed Enlightened Behaviors Into Cultures And Laws

We have begun to go down that path for idealistic reasons already — and once we add intellectual thinking to our idealism, we will be able to make major progress at multiple levels on our intergroup issue.

We have been on a path for more than a century to take effective steps on an issue-by-issue basis against the negative impact of the situational conspiracies that have existed against both minority Americans and women.

We have decided in our formal public policy settings to favor integration over segregation and we have decided to create equal access to both jobs and education. We have not done that perfectly, but our direction in those areas is clear. Moving to inclusion and opportunity for people from all groups and every gender is a good path to be on.

The path we need to be on to fully mitigate our more negative intergroup instinctive behaviors has some clearly defined steps. That path should include some very intentional stages that are outlined in both *Cusp of Chaos* and *The Art of InterGroup Peace* — two sister books to this book.

As we become more enlightened, we need to be deliberate and entirely systematic in defining, implementing, and protecting our more enlightened behaviors.

We are making slow but steady progress in many ways that will change the history of our country by following that agenda and by implementing that multi-step alignment implementation strategy.

We need to start by figuring out what our behaviors in a given area should be. On each discriminatory issue, we need to initially identify the unenlightened behaviors we want to fix and the intergroup sins that we want to correct.

Then, we need to go through a collective thought and policy making process as an increasingly enlightened people that ends up with us deciding to change that particular inappropriate and negative behavior and negative and damaging set of values and replace it with a more enlightened behavior and value set.

Then we need to implement the change we decide to use. Implementation is step three and stage three of the process... not stage one.

It Often Takes a Law to Create, Preserve, And Protect

Enlightened Behavior

Successfully replacing an old, negative, and damaging behavior for any area of intergroup behavior very often takes a law of some kind — both to legally end the old behavior and to functionally implement the new one.

It often takes a law to get rid of some types of old negative and perversely instinctive behavior for several reasons.

The first reason that it takes a law to get rid of an unenlightened behavior is because without a law, the people who believe in those old behaviors and people whose instincts call for them to act in those unenlightened intergroup ways will generally want to keep behaving in those ways and those people will simply continue to do what they want to do unless it is illegal for them to do it.

We need to make several kinds of old behaviors illegal in order to end those old behaviors for those people.

Ending slavery ultimately required a law. People who owned slaves would not have voluntarily ended slavery. Some pockets of functional slavery actually existed even after the law and the decree ending slavery was passed.

It took an explicit law to force people who supported the old behavior to end the old behavior, and then it took consistent enforcement of the law to make it functional and relevant.

The new law needed enforcement to actually change that behavior.

The Law Gives Us A Tool To Codify Expectations

The second reason it often takes a law to change behaviors is that simply going through the processes involved in making the law gives us a context and opportunity to clearly define and explain exactly what the new right behavior is. Being explicit about a desired behavior is very useful. Extending the right to vote to women needed to be clearly spelled out in a law that created that explicit voting right for women.

If women showed up in any setting to vote without a law that very clearly said that each woman in that setting had the right to vote, then the people in each polling setting who did not want women to vote could have simply refused those women access to the voting process.

That actually was what happened before that law changed. Women who wanted to vote were not given access to ballots and they were denied the process of voting across our country.

The new law made it functionally clear that women could vote and created an expectation relative to the right to vote, and then actual subsequent enforcement of that law enabled voting to happen.

Codified And Internalized Expectations Often Become Beliefs

The third reason to write a new behavior into a law is that each explicit enlightened behavior that is clearly embedded in a law is likely to become a clear expectation and becoming an expectation significantly helps that specific explicit behavior become part of our functional culture.

Expectations become beliefs. That is an instinct-sculpted thought process. Our cultures have explicit sets of rules that tell us what our behavioral expectations in that culture are. Once the expectations become clear, we embed them in our belief system for what we should or should not do.

Both paradigms and cultures tell us what we should and should not do. That is a key function of both processes.

The process can be both direct and clear.

Laws that forbid discrimination in hiring based on race or sex can have their ambiguities, but when the law forbidding discrimination is in place and when the law says clearly that an employer can't say to a job

applicant — “I will not hire you for this job because you are a woman... or because you are Black... or because you are homosexual... or because you are old...” then people in hiring positions who believe the law is real and who believe that the law will be enforced will change their expectations and those people will also change their behaviors relative to those particular hiring barriers.

Those people who change behaviors because of law may not become personally enlightened about those specific behavior and value points immediately, but the old absolute and intentional barriers to hiring definitely do go down when those old barriers become illegal.

That makes the new behaviors become much more likely to happen.

It also helps the new expectations become part of people’s personal value sets. Our thought processes have the tendency to embed our required behaviors in any area into our sense of what we “should” do on any given issue.

We tend to incorporate our “should” thinking into our value sets — for at least the setting and situation where the requirement exists.

Building a new expected behavior into our value sets is more likely to happen when the expectations about each new behavior are made very clear by being codified, embedded, and made explicit as a component of a law.

Progress On Key Areas Often Happens In Stages

As noted earlier in this book, cultural expectations need to be both enforced and reinforced to become the normal behavior for a group of people.

Successes that happen in any setting that are based the new rule set or the new law also need to be celebrated and clearly explained in order for people to both understand the new expectations and to understand their value.

The whole change process often happens in stages. Sometimes several stages are needed to make the entire change process succeed for key areas of our lives.

The next chapter of this book deals with that reality and describes some of the key stages that we should understand and expect.