

Chapter Six — We Have Discriminated As A Country Based On Who Is “Us” And Who Is “Them”

We all need to understand where we have been as a country in order to understand where we need to go next as a country.

We all need to have a clearer understanding of our history of intergroup interactions — and we particularly need to understand how our basic sets of instinctive behaviors have given us the history we share today.

It has been truly fascinating, very insight provoking, and extremely useful for me to look at our history as a nation very directly from the perspective of our instinctive intergroup behaviors.

Once I had a good understanding of the range and variety of ways that we instinctively treat people when we have both our most positive and our most negative intergroup instincts fully activated, then major areas of our history made much more sense.

We have been both saints and sinners in our national intergroup history in ways that were clearly influenced and shaped in major ways by our intergroup instinct packages. I could easily see a number of significant areas where we had sinned badly as a nation and where we had damaged

people in very intentional ways based on having our “Them” related instincts activated.

I could also see a wide range of areas where we have clearly had our “us” instincts in full gear and where we have done some of the very best things we could do as people for one another. We have been one of the most internally supportive nations on the planet when we have had our collective “us” instinctively activated.

We Are Good At Our Best And Evil At Our Worst

At our best, we are really good to one another. At our best, we act in enlightened and caring ways in our group interactions and in our personal interactions with one another.

At our worst — we do evil things to one another and we feel no guilt doing those evil things. At our worst, we do damage to groups of people and to individuals within groups in truly unconscionable ways and do not activate our conscience in the process.

That set of often-contradictory behaviors has shaped who we are and it has shaped what we have done for a very long time. I began to understand that we can’t really collectively understand our history as a nation until we all understand and appreciate the impact of both sets of behaviors.

As an “us,” we have been a beacon of enlightenment for the world. We have created what was, for a very long time, one of the best and most inclusive public school systems on the planet. We have been exemplifiers of democracy, free enterprise, and true individual opportunity for people at multiple levels.

No one in the world has exceeded our commitment to free speech and to freedom of religion. We have preached liberty and the pursuit of happiness and we have celebrated, endorsed, and supported both of those sets of beliefs and behaviors.

Our national rhetoric about respecting who we are as individuals has been a model and an inspiration for similar belief systems across the globe.

People have perceived us to be the land of freedom and the land of opportunity for centuries. For the specific subsets of Americans who have been fully included in that enlightened vision, America has been the best place to live and America has been the best place to be in the entire world for a long period of time.

The Majority Has Discriminated Directly Against People
Perceived To Be “Them”

At that same time that we have been a beacon of enlightenment at many levels, we have discriminated extensively and very explicitly by race, by ethnicity, and by gender. When the majority group who has governed this country has perceived any sets of people to be a “Them,” the consequences of that perception have created — and still create — major problems for those specific groups of our people who are perceived to be “Them.”

There is no way that we can deny our damaging intergroup behaviors that have been done very intentionally to specific groups of people in this country for very long periods of time.

At our worst, we actually enslaved people. This country committed that extreme sin of enslavement very explicitly and very intentionally by race for a very long period of time.

So as I looked at our history in the context of our us/them packages of instincts, it was clear that those specific packages of instincts have influenced us and guided us at very high levels in both positive and negative ways for our entire existence as a country. We have made many decisions about our behaviors and our values based on the guidance given to us by our intergroup packages of instincts.

In some cases, those behaviors and the values that have emerged from those instincts have been damaging and even evil at their core.

The primary realization about our intergroup packages of instincts that gives me hope for a better future is that I have come to understand and believe that even though our basic us/them sets of instincts can't be erased or even changed, we do have significant flexibility in determining who is us and who is them in any setting and we can structure and channel those sets of instincts to create better and more enlightened outcomes for us all.

We can extend the blessings and the beneficial behaviors that relate to “us” to more people simply by very intentionally adding more people to the group we perceive and define to be “us.”

We Can Be Flexible In Seeing People As “Us”

I learned very early in my study of the impact that those instincts have on our behavior and on our collective history, that we functionally have some flexible and extremely useful patterns and processes relative to who we define as us and them. It was clear to me from looking at people in multiple settings and situations in our country and around the world that we actually have significant flexibility in creating our categories of us and them and then in determining who fits into each category that we create.

Once I understood that flexibility to exist, it became clear to me that the flexibility we have on that issue of defining categories of “us” can be a great asset to us and that it can, in fact help us to achieve Peace in settings that would otherwise be conflicted.

It can be good and very useful in many ways to be able to have multiple categories of “us” in our lives because we do so much better in our interactions with other people when we perceive other people for any significant reason to be “us.”

As I looked at those sets of intergroup issues over time, it became clear to me that deliberately and strategically creating the right categories of us can functionally help us do some of the good things that we need to do for each other at multiple levels.

It can be very good to be a country where our best and most enlightened features and our best us instincts extend to all of us in the very best and most inclusive ways.

When those “us” related instincts are activated in any setting, they make certain positive and supportive behaviors feel right to us in that setting.

That flexibility in defining who is an “us” is critical to our chances of creating intergroup Peace for our entire country and in all of the communities that comprise our country.

We Begin By Dividing By Family, Clan, And Tribe

To make that strategy work, we need to expand who we consider to be “us.”

We all usually begin by determining who is our own basic “us” by our tribe, clan, and family. Those basic, functional, and very primal alignments of “us” tend to feel “normal” to each of us. Each of those basic and fundamental alignment categories can feel very right to us and we generally all find it easy to align with those basic categories of “us.”

Those are, in fact, the first categories of “us” that we all find relevant in our lives. Those categories of us have multiple levels of benefits for us — because it is a good thing when our family and the people around us are an “us” and treat us as an “us.”

Those particular basic categories can sometimes create their own sets of problems, however, because when we define our own family as “us,” then it can be equally easy to define other families as “Them.”

That can be a bad thing, because we each tend to distrust, dislike, and even mistrust any “Them.” The basic instinctive reciprocity processes that occur in each setting from us seeing someone to be “Them” then tend to cause each “Them” in that setting to echo our reactions and to distrust, dislike, and even mistreat “us.”

That set of reciprocal interactions can create its own obviously problematic and even perverse outcomes in the settings where they are activated.

Some family feuds in some worst case settings result in people killing other people from other feuding families for generations — even centuries.

The good news for us relative to all of those interactions between local sets of us and them is that we are not limited to those definitions of us and we can expand beyond family in determining who we perceive to be “us” in any situation or setting.

We actually all have a wide variety of possible other “us” groupings that can also each feel appropriate to us. Each of the other “us “ groupings that we create can also each feel right and each can structure our thoughts and our behaviors relative to other people in a setting at the time and in the places that we create and use those additional “us” groupings.

We Can Create Multiple Categories Of “Us”

The reality is that we generally have the ability to assign an instinctive sense of “us” to any grouping of people that fills the operational role of being an “us” for what we perceive to be a relevant purpose or a relevant function.

We can be Marines as an “us” or we can be priests as an “us” — and both of those categories can trigger a sense in us that we are part of an aligned and real “us.” We have the ability to create and use multiple functional categories of us that can each trigger a sense of alignment for us with the set of people who fit that functional definition.

For each category of us that we create, we tend to be both inclusive and accepting of the other people who we perceive to also fit the definition and who we perceive to also be included in that specific category of us.

We Can Function As An “Us” At Many Levels

We can identify in a patriotic and overarching way with “us” as a nation. We can be Americans as an us. We can also be an “us” with fellow fans of the same athletic team.

We can also identify as “us” with other people who share our core beliefs. We can create an ideological us.

We can be an “us” with people who share our trade or our profession.

Union members can be an “us.” Unions tend to have a very strong, very intentional, and highly deliberate sense of being an “us” for their union members.

Professors can be an “us.” Professors of English literature can be a clearly defined subcategory of “us.”

People who define themselves as members of any particular us tend to feel an alignment with their own group for relevant issues.

People in each category and setting have the potential to define their own category of us in both narrow and broad terms. When the definitions used for a particular category of “us” are narrow, English professors, for example, can feel that other types of professors might be, for some purposes, “Them.”

Each of those definitions of “us” is relevant relative to the people who have the personal attributes that qualify for inclusion in each specific level, type and category of us.

I have seen all of those categories function with people I know to create a sense of us. I have seen many people who build major parts of their lives around their interactions and alignments with their favorite “us” and

who focus significant energy on their own relative personal function and their own personal role in the context of their chosen and preferred “us.”

It Feels Right To Be In Our Categories Of “Us”

When we are in a category of us that makes us feel right, that can be a real blessing for our lives and can give us a context for our thinking and our behaviors that lets us work together and live together in mutually supportive ways.

I have found, in a wide range of settings, that I can generally personally interact with the people in almost any setting to figure out what category and definition of “us” might be aligning for that group and for that setting.

Getting a group of divergent health care specialists in a meeting setting to overlook their current us/them inter-specialty feelings and inter-specialty divisions that each person had coming into the meeting by having the group redefine itself to be “patient centered caregivers,” for example, can be transformational in getting people in a care setting to be synergistic and collaborative rather than being more feudal and functionally tribal along specialty alignments.

Connecting With “Us” Feels Natural And Normal

It was clear to me fairly early in the learning process that when we relate to an “us” of any category, it generally feels natural to connect with that “us.”

That connection with each “us” just feels normal. It is the “natural” thing to do. We don’t even make those links consciously, in many cases, because we often don’t tend to think explicitly about doing most of the things that feel normal to us.

We tend to take anything that feels normal for granted and we simply do things that feel normal as an unspoken guidance for our behaviors.

My experience has been that we very often do not recognize or know at an intellectual or consciously cognitive level that we have activated a set of “us-related” instinctive behaviors and instinct-linked thought processes in our minds for any set of people that we identify as an “us.”

We simply activate those us-linked thought processes and behaviors whenever we have a situational sense of being an “us.” The subsequent connections and the subsequent interactions we have with that “us” feel right, normal, and entirely appropriate to us.

When those sets of instincts are activated for any category of “us,” they affect the way we think about our “us” and they affect the way we think about anyone who is not our “us” relative to that “us.”

Those thought processes have a constant impact on our lives. They tend to create a significant context for the way we think about the various people in our lives and in our world.

Fans Of Soccer Teams Can Riot As An “Us”

When I first started to study those issues, I was surprised to see how wide the range of categories was that can drive a range of fairly influential us/them thought processes and behaviors. I was also surprised to see that even some relatively trivial categorizations of us and them can actually activate that very basic set of reactions and emotions and drive our thinking and our behaviors in fairly powerful ways.

Support for athletic teams, I saw, could create enough allegiance to an “us” that some people in some athletic team-related settings do extreme things out of fan loyalty. Soccer fans with those instincts activated may even riot and do very intentional damage to who ever in that setting is perceived to a “them” to their team and its fans.

I have been in several cities in both Europe and South America where friends told me not to attend a soccer game in person because I might accidentally cheer in a way that would make me a “Them” to some of the local fans.

Those unintentional behaviors on my part could, they assured me, actually cause people around me to hurt me in some way or even actually kill me if I felt to those fans to be a pure “Them.”

Soccer stadiums in multiple cities actually have chain-link fences to separate the fans of the teams that are playing there. Police with well-designed enforcement equipment keep those fans in those stadiums from crossing the intergroup lines that are created by those fences.

I do not personally scoff at those athletic-team related feelings of allegiance to athletic teams. I have a couple of teams that I personally have a fan allegiance relationship with. I understand clearly what power those alignment feelings can have for other people in some situations because I have had those particular highly instinctive impacts happen in my own head on more than one occasion.

I once barely resisted the temptation to throw a beer bottle from an open box at a very effective and insulting heckler from another team who was in my home team's stadium.

I did not throw that particular bottle — available to me as a glass bottle in a stadium setting only because I was watching the game from another CEO's private box — but I did feel a very clear and even powerful temptation in that moment to throw that bottle I was holding. I clearly envisioned its direct trajectory to that deeply annoying person's head.

That incident was, of course, a very clear us/them situation and a pure us/them response in my own head. The fan who triggered my situational anger with his taunts was wearing a Styrofoam cheese head hat out of loyalty to his own team, so I suspect the actual damage to his head from the thrown bottle would have been minimal.

Overall, as I looked at all of those sets of instinctive behaviors and at multiple levels of us/them differentiation that we use in many settings, it was clear to me that whenever and however those perceptions are activated, we each tend to act far too often in very predictable and consistent ways toward whoever is us and toward whoever is them.

Which Us/Them Categories Have Had The Biggest Impact On Our History?

Knowing those behavior patterns that result from our various us/them differentiations to be true, I spent some time looking at our history trying to figure out what sets of us and them differentiations had created the most difficulty and had set up the biggest intergroup challenges for us as a country.

It was clear to me that we have had significant levels of intergroup damage in this country that had those packages of instincts at their core. I took a look at our history to see which sets of us/them differentiation factors had the longest and largest historical impact.

I looked carefully to see if the major negative group interaction patterns that have created the most damage and had the biggest negative impact on our history as a country were created by tribe or by ethnicity or by race.

I also looked to see if our centuries of intergroup problems and negative intergroup behaviors came from affiliation with a religion, a philosophy, an ideology, or some other kind, type, or category of belief systems.

My goal for that us/them category delineation analysis approach and thought process was to zero in on the main triggers for our historic problematic behaviors so that I could figure out functional and consistent ways for us to have a positive and ameliorative impact on those specific problematic intergroup triggers for our future as a country.

In the spirit and mode of data driven and fact-driven continuous improvement methodology and in the context of a very intentional continuous improvement anchored tool kit and analytic thought process, I looked hard to see which specific and explicit differentiation factors have had the most impact on us and which differentiation factors have given us the most grief as a nation.

We have clearly discriminated as a country against our various minority groups at multiple levels. We have had a history of legal and economic discrimination that had clear linkages to race, ethnicity, and gender.

My goal was to figure out which of our categories of us and them have created the most problems for us as a country.

I sorted through our history and our current behaviors at multiple levels to figure out what those particular differentiations were that have

created our biggest problems — and also created our best and most inclusive behaviors.

What I found initially surprised me — and then it made perfect sense. It was so painfully basic that it initially took my breath away — and then it made some very basic levels of both analysis and strategy development much clearer and easier to do.

That set of basic us/them trigger factors that have created most of our key intergroup problems was so important and powerful that it deserves its own chapter.

The next chapter of this book deals directly with those factors and issues.

I wanted to figure out what particular triggers have existed in our country that have created those consistent long-standing patterns and far too consistent instances of discriminatory behavior.

Sight And Sound — At a Core Level — Help Define Us And
Identify Them

I was initially surprised at what I found as the basic patterns for our most consistent discrimination when I did that search.

As I looked at our basic patterns of instinctive intergroup behaviors in this country — both current and historic — it became clear to me that we have very consistently discriminated against people who have been perceived to be “Them” by the majority group in this country — and that the two very specific triggers we have used most consistently in our country for a couple of centuries to identify who is “us” and who is “them” is literally how we look and how we sound.

Sight and sound turned out to be the two key underlying intergroup differentiation factors that have existed for all of the main and long-standing negative patterns of negative intergroup behavior that we have as a country.

That seemed to be too simple to be true. But when I looked at all of the various issues and categories of intergroup discrimination and negative intergroup interaction that we have faced as a nation for the past couple of centuries, the evidence was pretty clear that those two, very basic, perception-based factors are, in fact, the two most significant and consistent intergroup differentiation triggers that have steered us for centuries as a nation down the problematic paths we have followed for our most important and long-standing intergroup interactions.

We have discriminated as a nation against my group that did not look like the White American majority group and that did not sound like the White American majority group.

After thinking about that very consistent discrimination pattern to figure out why it might be true, I concluded that we have followed that differentiation path between group that is created by those two triggers because sight and sound tend to tell any us at a very core and instinct-linked primal level if someone is an “us” or if someone is a “them.”

The Intergroup Discrimination Patterns Have Been Extremely

Consistent

I looked long and hard at our history. There has been short-term discrimination against people from every group, but all the major, basic long-standing negative patterns of major intergroup prejudice and intergroup discrimination in this country have very consistently travelled that explicit two-factor perception pathway for long-term patterns of intergroup discrimination.

That particular intergroup differentiation pattern that is based on our appearance and that is based on how we sound when we speak has held true for a very long time. It was clear to me — once I saw that pattern to be true

— that those specific differentiation factors shape and influence our perception patterns and our behavior patterns even today.

This nation has clearly differentiated in a negative and consistent way as a nation against anyone who looked different or sounded different than the White majority group who has held power in America for all of those years.

We are just now freeing ourselves from the grip of that specific underlying guidance and that particular group definition path for some of our key intergroup interactions as a nation today.

The basic pattern has been this. We had a majority group who set the laws of this country who has tended to discriminate in very explicit ways against anyone who did not look like that majority group and who discriminate as well against any group or any people who did not sound like that majority group.

That approach was very inclusive at one level.

People who looked like and who sounded like that particular group were accepted as an us. But people who looked different from that us were all treated in various ways as a “Them.”

It was painfully clear from our history as a nation that the White majority group has very clearly and consistently discriminated against and even oppressed any group that did not both look White and sound White.

Anyone Who Was Not “White” Faced Discrimination

That particular differentiation pattern that is based at a very core level on the people in the “us” group in this country looking alike and sounding alike has benefited some people in this country and it has clearly hurt others.

For the majority group of people in this country who have looked alike and who have sounded alike for all of those years, that approach created a clear “us.” The people included in that “us” were given clear and direct access to the American Dream and those people were given equal protection under the laws of the country.

For the people who looked different or who sounded different than that specific majority group “us,” those groups were perceived to be various types of “Them” and people from those groups were treated in various ways like “Them.” Discrimination against each type of “Them” has been a consistent and constant reality for each category of “Them.”

Laws were written that discriminated explicitly, intentionally, and directly against each set of “them.”

That pattern of discrimination against people who did not look White or who did not sound White has done damage to many people for many years because of multiple layers of negative behaviors that were done to the other groups in this country by the majority group White “us.”

“White” discrimination existed in explicit and intentional ways against any “Them” who was not White.

That seems too simple to be true — but it clearly is true. Once I perceived those patterns to exist, I could see those patterns as absolute patterns everywhere I looked.

From the perspective of data based, process improvement-linked, problem delineation, and process focused thought processes, it was clear to me that was the exact package and pattern of intergroup behavior that happened in almost all settings for groups of people in this country.

When I looked at a purely analytical level to see what the key differentiation factors were that had been the underlying issues for those centuries of negative intergroup interactions, it was clear to me that sight and sound have been two key and consistent differentiation factors that have triggered and activated the instinctive alarm systems and thought processes

for the majority group in this a country and that have kept those alarms activated for a very long time.

The White Majority Was Not Aware Of The Instinctive Origin Of Its Behaviors

White people who discriminated for all of those years have generally not been conscious or aware of the specific instincts or the basic thought processes that actually sat under those discriminatory intergroup behaviors at a foundational level.

The majority group in this country has unconsciously, but very consistently, functionally used those two basic triggers as a nation to decide who was us and who was them — and then this nation has acted accordingly.

Those two basic and primal triggers tend to operate at a thinking level and in a thought process that we generally do not even know exists. It simply feels natural to differentiate between people based on those factors. Those differentiation reactions have deep instinctive roots — and they continue to affect how we think today without us being aware that those instincts are shaping our behaviors to the degree that our behaviors are being shaped.

Those perceptions about other people based on what people look like and on what people sound like still tend to be triggered today. They are, as a matter of course, triggered in each of us consistently and constantly.

We all — from every group of people — generally each react situationally at an instinctive level to those differentiation factors without realizing consciously what the specific factors have been that have actually caused each of us to personally and situationally differentiate between people and between groups of people.

Baby Brain Scans Differentiate By Sight And Sound

We all do that kind of differentiation based on those specific factors because that way of thinking is built into our very basic perceptual mental structures.

We tend to have subconscious alarm bells going off if people look different or sound different than us.

Those bells actually begin when children are in the crib. Brain scans of babies tell us that babies differentiate in very early months of life when people look different or sound different than the sight and the sound that the baby is used to seeing and hearing from the baby's personal experience.

Those specific bells exist for us at that very basic perceived differentiation level because those bells have actually helped people survive in a wide range of primal settings for a very long time.

Those Alarms Have Helped People Survive

The alarm bells exist and they are triggered when people look or sound “different” than us because people historically have been at risk from damage done by “Them.”

People have lived in tribal groups and in clans going back to the dawn of history. The functional reality is that the clans and the tribes in all settings have tended to be people who looked like each other. Those tribes sounded like each other and who often lived in a state of conflict with their neighbors, tribes, and clans who tended to have their own apparel, language, and differences in appearance from one another.

Each group made their own primal group their “us” and each group made every other primal group a “Them.” People then supported “us” in local settings and often damaged “Them.”

That set of significant consequences for being us or them is not only ancient history. Those consequences are still relevant today in many settings.

Far too many people in various settings in the world today still live literally in situations and settings where their lives could be at risk anytime those people are actually in the physical presence of “Them.”

I had to recognize that sad reality about current risk levels as I thought about this set of issues and as I felt bad that those sets of instincts had influenced us in our country in such negative ways for so many years. That set of intergroup danger issues has been around for a long time and it is very real for people in far too many settings today.

It was easy for me to see the historical and functional roots for those differentiation defining approaches and behaviors. Our own most primal ancestors faced very real life threatening risks from local “Them” groups at multiple levels in many settings.

Our ancestors who paid attention to their instincts to avoid “Them” were more likely to survive. People in those early days who ignored that instinctive avoidance of “Them” were at higher risk — and those people are less likely to be our ancestors because it is hard to be an ancestor when you die young.

That is a useful set of instincts. It has been very good for people across the planet and back through history to know exactly who is “Them”

when the “Them” group in a setting actually are our very real enemies and when “Them” wants to do evil things to us.

It is particularly useful to know who the enemy is in a setting when that enemy in that “Them” category actually wants you damaged or wants you to be dead.

We Bond With — And Look Like — Our Most Primal “Us”

We all tend to be functionally safer when the people around us are an “us.” That is true for many categories of “us” and it has been particularly true for our most primal categories of “us.”

Those primal and most basic categories of “us” tend to anchor and define our set of appearance based learned perceptions and our core interpersonal interaction thought processes.

At a very basic level, our family tends to be the most primal group for all of us. Family is the most primal alignment level for most people ... and we all tend to be safer and more likely to be both protected and nurtured when the people around us are our own biological family.

For obvious and clearly biological reasons, the functional reality we all face is that our own particular family primal group almost always looks like “us” and our own personal family group also generally sounds like “us.”

We each tend to identify the other people in our primal us at a core and almost immediate perceptual level by sight and by sound because people from our most primal group for each of us almost always does sound and look like us.

Our thought processes and our emotional responses tend to be affected at both conscious and subconscious levels by that particular perception of us and them — once we have perceived that sense of difference between an us and a them to exist in any setting.

If feels good to be surrounded by “us.”

At a fundamental and basic instinctive level, we each tend to feel some comfort and we each tend to have a sense of relative safety when we literally can see and hear us all around us. We each tend to feel concern at an equally instinctive level when the way that other people who are around us either look or sound tells us that we are functionally currently surrounded by “Them.”

Detecting “Them” Can Help Us Survive Even Today

In another chapter of this book, I tell the story of personally having those sets of instincts activated in ways that set off major alarm bells for me personally at a deeply instinct-linked level in both Jamaica and Uganda.

I had a sense of pure instinctive intergroup panic that was triggered in my head in specific us/them perception situations that happened in those settings that temporarily paralyzed, panicked, and incapacitated me twice, even though the truth was that my life was actually not at risk in any way in either setting.

After having those two personal panic attacks, I will never again underestimate the negative impact we can each feel at a very basic instinctive level when it feels to us that everyone around us is a “Them.” In my case, there was no real and functional threat in either setting, but my own sense of being surrounded by “Them” literally incapacitated me both times.

In any case, we sadly need to honestly recognize the fact that it is not inaccurate to say that the instinctive concern we often feel about being surrounded by “Them” is, in fact, sometimes functionally relevant and it is entirely legitimate for large numbers of people in various settings today to beware of “Them” for at least some of the time.

“Them” in today’s world — and in our own settings and communities — can be dangerous and even evil. We have clearly not eliminated evil and or eliminated damaging intergroup behaviors from the modern world.

People Are Being Killed Today For Being “Them”

Some people who I have talked to about those sets of issues have told me that they believe that those kinds of primal instinctive reactions to other groups of people are not relevant or needed in modern times.

Those people are wrong.

There are groups of people in the Middle East and in Northern Africa today, as I write this page of this book, who are killing entire groups of other people just for being “them.” People are being killed, captured, and even enslaved in a number of settings because those people are a category of “Them.”

Those behaviors in those settings by those people in those situations could not be more primal — and those kinds of evil primal intergroup behaviors are clearly not limited to the Middle East and Northern Africa.

I have looked everywhere to see how relevant those instinctive behaviors still are. Myanmar and The Dominican Republic are expelling people today based entirely on their ethnicity. Multiple groups in Asia, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, and Africa are killing other groups of people and are killing those people from other groups today as I write this page.

We clearly have not achieved a world of intergroup Peace and intergroup harmony where those kinds of internal instinctive warning signals are functionally irrelevant to people across the planet.

Knowing who is “Them” in a setting is still extremely relevant for large numbers of people in the world today — and we all can easily see that the knowledge about who is “them” has been important for people as far back in history as we have interacted as groups of people in any setting with other groups of people.

We Have Some Neighborhoods Where Those Differentiations Matter For Reasons Of Personal Safety

It is often very important in many settings around the world for people in those settings to know who in their setting is us and to also know who in their setting is them.

In our own country, to be honest with ourselves, we also have a number of neighborhoods in various cities today where those particular differentiation factors can also affect people’s personal safety and even survival.

People from various groups can be at risk in some of our cities at least some of the time if people go into the “wrong” neighborhoods for their group.

I have had that experience myself. When the most recent riots happened in Oakland, California, where I worked at that time, there were a couple of days where we shut down our business operations and we had people stay home.

The security team I had working with me at that time made it very clear to me with a high level of energy that I personally needed to stay out of the intergroup danger zone for that riot.

My own personal very positive belief system about enlightened and mutually beneficial intergroup issues and my own strong belief about the need for us all to win and for us all to be at Peace with each other in every setting would not have been as relevant to the people who were rioting in those particular streets at that particular moment in time as my appearance and the way I sound.

The way I look was directly relevant to me at a very primal level in that moment because my appearance could have placed me in harms way for

at least part of those days of troubled circumstances in downtown Oakland had I gone out on some of those wrong streets at the wrong point in time.

I resisted the temptation to test the risk level out at a personal level because the upside benefit of not being damaged did not come close to offsetting the downside risk of being damaged in that setting and situation.

There are major areas of Chicago, Detroit, Los Angeles, and Richmond where gang dominance over particular neighborhoods makes it unsafe for people from other groups to be alone and on foot in those settings.

Sight And Sound Can Trigger Us And Them Instincts

Sight is not the only perceptual trigger that tells people whether another person is an “us” or a “Them.” The way people sound can also get people categorized in some settings and situations as a “Them.”

Sight, alone, is not always sufficient as a group differentiation trigger because sometimes the “Them” in a relevant and dangerous intergroup setting actually looks just like “us.”

But the reality often is that the relevant “Them” in many intergroup settings actually has a high likelihood of not sounding like us.

Individual groups in each setting each tend to sound like themselves. Groups tend to have their own dialect or their own language — and the way

people sound can tell other people what group a person is part of. In most purely tribal settings, the relevant groups of people each tend to have either their own separate group language or their own version or dialect of a shared language.

We Have A Remarkable Ability To Discern Differences In

Sound

That set of language differences by group is important to help us detect “Them” — because even when people in a setting might look very much like “us,” they might not actually be us. People from another tribe can easily be a “Them” who is motivated in various ways to do damage to “us.” In the real world, we can often discern those differences in groups for each relevant person with a high level of accuracy by listening to how each person sounds when they speak.

If the people we are talking to seems to have a different language or even just a different dialect than ours, the truth is that our ears are actually extremely good at hearing even minor differences in accents or in dialects.

We clearly each have those specific instinctive sound differentiation abilities for language differentiation built into our mental tool kit at a very pure and powerful level for very good reasons. Those very effective sensory

distinctions have also been embedded in our consciousness and in our subconscious mind as a basic survival tool because they give us information that can improve our chances of survival.

As I mentioned earlier, we do actually do know now from new electronic scanning technology that babies only a month old have different brain waves when people next to them either look different or sound different. That discernment process based on how we sound starts young and it lasts a lifetime. We continue to have a reaction to people who look or sound different than our “us” for our entire adult lives.

We don't tend to think explicitly about those particular factors or those explicit trigger issues when we make our intergroup differentiation diagnosis.

It simply seems “natural” to us to make those distinctions and to have those sets of feelings about the people who trigger those specific perceptions.

We fall into categories of reacting to other people in ways that seem right to us because those behaviors fit our working sense of what is normal for us and what is normal for them in each setting.

America Has Discriminated Based On Sight And Sound

Our history as a nation has clearly been influenced and shaped to a significant degree by those perception issues and by their links to our instinctive thought processes, emotions, and behaviors.

The majority group in this country has discriminated explicitly for all of our history against anyone who did not look like the majority group “us” or sound like the majority group “us.”

The “us” that created those basic discrimination rules and practices for our country for the last couple of centuries have been White Americans who spoke the American version of English. That particular set of people looked White and they sounded White.

That set of people with those specific characteristics became the “White American Us.” That set of people with those particular characteristics made up the majority group for this country for a few hundred years.

It continues to be the majority group today, although the degree of relative majority status for that group is shrinking fairly quickly.

The Majority Group Discriminated Based On Sight And

Sound

The historical reality that we all need to understand and remember is that we have discriminated massively and we have discriminated very consistently as a country against everyone who did not fit that particular definition of “us.”

That consistency in discriminatory behavior is painfully obvious. Discrimination has happened at some levels to all groups who fit perceptual categories that trigger a sense of “Them.”

Sight and sound have been the triggers and the key difference factors for those overarching patterns of negative intergroup behaviors. Groups who did not look White or who did not sound White have faced discrimination from the people who were White from the earliest days when the first people who looked White invaded those continents.

We have created a wide range of excuses, explanations, and rationales for that discrimination — but at a very basic level, we made up those excuses to give us intellectual justification for what was actually a purely instinctive and very primal behavior pattern based on group perceptions.

It Felt Right To Discriminate Against “Them”

People in the majority group in this country have felt right in creating both laws and expectations that had those distinctions and those group

differentiations at their core because those specific intergroup behavior patterns have been rooted directly in the instinctive sense of us and them that all people have as a core package of instinctive behaviors.

Each law that discriminated against “Them” felt right to the group that perceived itself to be “us.” Banning Asian Americans from buying homes in parts of California felt right to the majority White “us” in those cities because group ethics and basic morality standards only apply at an instinct-supported level to our “us.”

Discriminating against Hispanics in Tucson and San Diego felt right to the White majority “us” because the people who were discriminated against in those settings felt to the White majority group to be a “Them” who needed to be constrained in some way and not supported or empowered in any way in that setting.

It is sobering and more than a little discouraging to discover that all of those patterns of negative behavior have hinged on those two, too basic, perceptual triggers. We acted for centuries based on those triggers without recognizing or understanding their function and their direct linkage to our instinctive thought processes, behaviors, emotions, and beliefs.

We allowed our instincts to sculpt our behaviors and we set up our cultures to support the behaviors that were triggered and sculpted by those instincts. That powerful process was intellectually invisible to us — so our intellects were under the invisible but powerful influence and direction of our cultures and our instincts rather than giving us tools to use to act in more enlightened ways that were based on values and not just instinctive reactions.

We can choose that set of processes. We can now choose to recognize those triggers for what they are — and we can choose to set those triggers aside and replace our sense of who is us and who is them using other triggers and other group delineation factors that are much more inclusive and far more enlightened.

Knowledge is power. This is clearly an area where our knowledge can give us far better thought processes and behaviors.

Now that we know that the discrimination was based on sight and sound — and now that we know that we can create other categories of “us” that overpower and neutralize the differentiation behaviors that stem from those basic perception factors — there is no excuse for us not to overpower those factors today in favor of an entirely new and more positive definition of “us.”

That gives us a wonderful set of opportunities going forward. We need to link those opportunities with the various triggers that can cause people in any setting to come together and create a sense of “us.”

Six basic alignment triggers that can help us do that work are described in the next chapter of this book.