

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

We Cannot Start with a Clean Slate – or Forgiveness

ONE OF THE more useful things that I have learned over the years in talking to many people from all groups about this entire array of intergroup issues has been that members from our various minority groups have tended to have a collective sense and belief that the White “Them” in this country is now and has been at a very direct level fully aware of the deliberate and clear levels of negative intergroup behavior that have been happening in so many places to so many people.

There is a sense among many minority Americans that the White Americans collectively and individually understand those basic intergroup issues and that large numbers of White Americans are fairly well aware of the challenges and problems that have existed at multiple levels for minority Americans.

There tends to be a sense from a number of minority Americans that the key barriers that exist in various settings for minority Americans are both intentional and visible to White Americans.

Those challenges look so obvious in daily life and in collective experience and shared history to minority Americans that I have heard a number of people from our minority groups say that those barriers must be clearly visible to all Americans, including White Americans.

That actually is not true. I have talked to a significant number of White Americans about those issues. My own experience has been that most White Americans have been basically unaware of — and cognitively oblivious to —

major and key components of the whole intergroup discrimination reality that is a daily fact of life for many minority Americans.

My conclusion from those conversations and from extensive reading I have done in various types of media and literature is that most White Americans in most settings actually have had no sense of those kinds of negative functional intergroup issues for the vast majority of the time.

When I tell people that I am working on these books and that I am trying to set up a learning and teaching process about racism, prejudice, and intergroup conflict, I get very mixed reactions from White Americans. Some people say — “Wow. Wonderful. This is the right time to do that work. Great and Cool. Write the books”

Other White people tell me that my books are not needed. A significant number of people say that we have made so much progress in recent years on intergroup issues and on the problems relating to racism in this country that we really need to focus now on other key and high priority issues — like the environment.

A number of White Americans have told me that things are actually much better for minority Americans today and that we have clearly achieved most of our key and most relevant intergroup goals as a country.

A number of White Americans do clearly know how serious those various intergroup issues are, but a very large percentage of White Americans have almost no clue about the scope of the pain that has been created by those issues and have no awareness of the residual anger and the intergroup distrust and stress levels that exist in far too many settings in this country today because of those negative intergroup behaviors.

Those intergroup issues and that intergroup anger that exists in multiple places sometimes becomes visible to everyone in the country when there is a trigger event of some kind that gets news media attention — like the Ferguson protests (that was shown as a photograph of the local Ferguson police tank on

the initial cover of this book) or the Oakland riots — but my own conclusion is that the day to day reality of those issues tends to be invisible to White people in various settings who aren't directly affected by them.

Many White Americans who don't know that those challenges and those negative patterns exist today generally do know and strongly believe that they personally and individually have had no intentional or direct involvement in creating any of the negative overall intergroup behavior patterns or in personally activating or triggering any of those negative intergroup incidents. Those White Americans know that they have personally not created any intentional negative intergroup patterns or been involved in any incidents of discriminatory intergroup behavior in any setting.

My experience has been that most White Americans do not think regularly about those sets of issues in any way. Those issues are not visible in the daily lives for that set of people and they are seldom discussed or considered at any level.

Most White Americans, I have seen, have tended to take their own personal relatively easy acceptance into the American Dream for granted. Those sets of people also have had no clear sense that some people in this country have been functionally and systematically excluded from that Dream.

Jim Crow Laws Were Deliberate Tools for Some People and Invisible to Others

The White people who wrote the Jim Crow laws were intentional racists. That is obvious and clear. The people who wrote those laws intended for those specific laws to do evil and damaging things against a group they perceived at the time they wrote the laws to be “Them.”

The very large numbers of White people in major areas of the country who did not write those particular laws and who did not personally and actively support any comparable set of intergroup behaviors tended to have almost no sense of their existence.

The people who did not directly create or who did not help to either write or enforce any of those discriminatory laws generally have had no sense of their relevance, their impact, or even their existence.

Laws that do not apply to you tend to be invisible. Restrictions that relate specifically to you tend to be perceived. Freedom to act in any area is rarely noticed as a relevant functionality. That freedom to act is just taken for granted by those who have it — and that freedom is only visible to those who do not have it.

We Have Passed Some Good Laws to Reduce Discrimination

We have been making some very meaningful progress.

We have recently passed a number of positive and enlightened laws that deal very directly with various levels of discrimination. Even though the overall awareness levels on those issues have been low, we actually have made significant legal progress in a number of areas relative to discrimination.

Largely in response to various levels of pressures from various civil rights movements, we have begun to correct several of our historic negative intergroup legal processes and approaches. We have fairly recently created some very good laws to deal directly with those issues.

But the truth is that we do have continued economic and education-related disadvantages for our minority Americans. There also continues to be a high level of intergroup resentment and intergroup anger from the people who had been damaged by current and prior discrimination.

The laws we have created have been good tools and they are extremely useful as change agents, but they haven't solved many of the underlying intergroup problems.

I Hoped That Awareness Alone Could Change Behavior

One of my initial hopes in writing the first drafts of these books was that we just needed to explain all of the basic instinct-related negative and positive intergroup facts and issues very clearly to everyone — and then the sheer and clear explanation of the role that those instincts have played in our history for our various intergroup issues would be enough of an intellectual new foundation to give us all a fresh start relative to intergroup interactions.

I thought in those early years of writing these books that shared knowledge about our behaviors in those key areas would be sufficient all by itself to give us a new foundation for intergroup interaction and I believed and hoped that the more problematic intergroup situations would all somehow self-correct when people understand our basic behaviors and their causal factors more clearly.

That was a naïve and inaccurate assumption.

I was wrong.

Very wrong.

I have explained those sets of instincts fairly clearly to people in a number of settings — both in this country and in several other countries — and my experience was that the simple explanations of those key factors have not been sufficient to change significant intergroup behavior in positive and useful ways in any setting.

I now know that it takes more than a description of those instinctive behaviors to improve intergroup interactions. It takes a clear explanation of those issues combined with a well-designed and intentional functional strategy that uses those instincts as a tool for improvement.

I also learned that the problems had deeper roots and more complex consequences than I had hoped.

Forgiveness Is Impossible

One of my own most important personal learning moments happened when a reader of an earlier version of this book saw my explanation of those behaviors and read my conclusion in that version of the book that in order to go forward from here to create collective success for us all, we had to go through a period of both collective understanding and collective forgiveness and then we actually needed to very deliberately do a fresh start — a restart — for everyone from all groups.

I stated in that draft of my book that we all needed to clearly understand at an intellectual level what had driven all of those prior behaviors so we could all begin anew to get things more right than they have been.

I had hoped that the new knowledge about our prior behaviors and a deep and clear understanding of our instinctive thought processes would be — in its own right — healing.

That was not a good assumption to make.

That reader, an African American professional — a physician with great professional skills and solid accomplishments and a personal history of both service and compassion — said to me — “Do not ask me to forgive. I can never forgive. I might understand. Forgiveness is impossible.”

We Can't Change “What” We Are — but We Can Change “Who” We Are

That shocked me for a day — and then it made great sense. A clean restart is impossible. So is forgiveness. We can't ask for forgiveness. In fact, we should not ask for forgiveness. Forgiveness is the wrong strategy. Those sins were very real and there were very evil things that were done to people that can't be forgiven.

The people who did those sins should be held accountable for their sins and for those sins and those people should not be forgiven. Slavery is unforgiveable. Rape is unforgiveable. There is also not a fresh start and forgiveness for the people who did actual ethnic cleansing in any setting.

We do need, however, to do a fresh start for us all today relative to our next steps from this moment forward. We need a new direction and we need to begin again. I know that to be true. But I also now know that our new direction and our fresh start does not need — and will not involve — forgiveness of those sins.

We need to understand those old behaviors — and we need to clearly condemn those old behaviors — and we need to start fresh with a sense that we now each now need to be who we are and who we need to be today.

As I have said earlier in this book, and in each of the other books in this intergroup trilogy, a key point to understand is that we can't change what we are, but we can change who we are. We each can change who we are by deciding to act in enlightened ways on key issues.

When we are the people who act in enlightened ways on key issues, that gives us a foundation for a fresh start on key interactions and gives us a foundation for intergroup and interpersonal interactions that will create new and better levels of understanding and trust that begin now.

A Clean Slate Is Impossible

That fresh start will not be from a clean slate. I now understand that very clearly at a very personal level. I have had some personal learning experiences that have helped me understand those issues about the possibility of a clean slate fresh start at a whole new level.

One of my sons has given me the great blessing of mixed race grandchildren. When my grandson — with ancestry from Africa, Mexico, and Scandinavia — had an issue with some kids in his school in the first grade, I heard from my son and my daughter-in-law that an incident had happened.

I have five sons. All five of them are good people, but they each have a surplus of personality. If I had heard at that same age that any of them had an incident at school, I would have suspected immediately that my own son might have instigated something. Even when I knew none of the facts of the incident, I

would have had a predisposition and presupposition that my own son could well have created whatever problem had come into being.

By contrast — when my multi-ethnic grandson had an incident — my mind leaped in microseconds to racism. My conscious and subconscious thought process as a grandfather both went immediately to an explicit fear that he might have been racially attacked in some way.

I realized in that exact moment as I felt that very immediate and very direct fear about possible racist behavior against my grandson that my own prior hopes for a clean slate type of restart for us, as a society and a country were hopeless and even foolish.

The slate is not clean. We cannot pretend that the slate is clean. Racism happens in this country today. It is real. People do racist things. When people we love might be damaged by racist behavior from someone else, that the risk of racism is very real and the threat is very relevant.

I realized at that moment that we do need a deliberate and intentional restart — but we can never do that restart with a clean slate. Certainly not with a blank slate. We need to start from here with the reality of who we each are now and we also need to start from here with the reality of who the other people in our world are as well.

We Need to Intentionally Become an “Us”

We need value-based and enlightened collective behavior that does start now in a very intentional and inclusive way to help us be an “us” to one another. We need to build a new American Us in an inclusive way to cause us to be a set of people who collectively share, believe in, and commit to support and follow our best values.

The penultimate chapter of this book includes and describes an explicit list of those best values that can unite us. We all need to understand clearly the very explicit values we all share and we need to each share those values at a personal level. We need to commit individually and collectively to achieving and

supporting those enlightened sets of values in order to build on “us” that is very explicitly and intentionally anchored on what we all believe.

Trust has to be a key part of that process. We need to trust each other in making those values real. A simple amorphous collective sense of good will and a collective wave of mutual good intentions will not be sufficient to give us the functional real world interpersonal alignment that we need to bring us together and to keep us together in intergroup Peace and safety.

We need clear values that we all support and we need a sense of trust that we will actually all support one another in making those values our functional reality.

We Are Becoming Diverse and Self-Segregating

As I have looked at the situations that we are facing today as a country, I believe to my core that this is the right time to do that work.

One of the reasons why the time to do that work is now is that we are becoming very diverse as a country very quickly — and we need to deal with that growing and pervasive diversity in ways that will make it a strength rather than a threat. We are seeing a number of intergroup behavior patterns in our country that could, if they go too far in the wrong directions, significantly increase our risk of intergroup conflict, anger, and division.

As I mentioned earlier, many of our cities — instead of integrating — are very clearly and intentionally self-segregating. People in American cities are choosing, for obviously instinct-linked reasons, to live with other people like themselves.

Those kinds of choices that we each make about where we all live make perfect instinctive sense. But those choices to live with other people like ourselves can create some instinct-triggering levels of concern about the next level of intergroup behaviors and intergroup consequences that could result from people living in separated groupings. It could be bad for us as a country if we allow those separated settings where we live with our own “us” in groups have

major areas that become alien territory and even dangerous turf to various other sets of people.

Ethnic separation is the path we are on today in many of our cities. We need to make sure that those levels of separation by group do not create a dangerous and divisive context of turf conflict and negative intergroup territorial behavior.

We clearly do not want those divisions into racial or ethnic groups by neighborhoods to create personal risk for people who live in the wrong turf for their own group or who even situationally travel through the wrong turf.

Personal risk can easily happen. Turf instincts are powerful and can cause people to act in some very negative ways when turf protection instincts are triggered.

Those kinds of turf encroachment risks exist for people in a number of settings in our cities today.

I have been in many of our major American cities. I have also looked at the census data about where people live in our major cities — with areas of each city broken out by race and ethnicity.

It is absolutely clear that we have managed to create situations in city after city where major neighborhoods are overwhelmingly ethnic or racial and have a very clear ethnic or racial identity.

Neighborhoods Have High Ethnic Concentration Levels

Driving to work in downtown Oakland from my home on Alameda Island, I went through ethnic neighborhoods that were almost as ethnically focused and concentrated as the countries of Europe used to be. I drove through black neighborhoods, Hispanic neighborhoods, Chinese American neighborhoods, Vietnamese neighborhoods, and a small Native American neighborhood.

It was clear from the signs on the store windows and from the people standing on the sidewalks and in the streets which particular ethnic neighborhood I was in at any given point in time. Each of the neighborhoods has its clear ethnic concentration and each has its own territorial gangs — with

gang members in some areas having frightening levels of control over relevant stretches of turf.

Shootings happen almost every day in those neighborhoods as the result of gang behavior — and more than 100 people a year are killed just in that city by those shootings.

My Friend Was Car Jacked

My security team at my company did not like the fact that I drove down those particular streets in Oakland to get to work. Our security advisors strongly preferred that I get on the freeway and off the streets and simply buzz past and around all of those neighborhoods.

I actually did start to do exactly that after a civic leader friend of mine who was driving down that same street had his car very skillfully boxed in at a stoplight by two vans. He was car jacked at gunpoint and he was forced to lie face down on the street while the carjackers from a local gang drove away with his car.

Ethnic neighborhoods and gang-related geographies like the ones we see today in Oakland happen in city after city. Instinctive triggers are involved in creating each of those ethnic concentrations. People everywhere tend to make choices to live with other people from the same culture, the same race, and the same ethnicity.

Those ethnically segregated neighborhoods in Oakland — or in any of the other ethnically focused cities — are not being created by external forces or mandated in some way by the kinds of local laws that once only allowed Chinese Americans, for example, to live in the local Chinatown.

The old levels of segregation that existed for a very long time in our cities actually were often very deliberately created by those kinds of explicit racial restriction laws. There used to be laws that clearly stated by race where people could live and where people could not live.

Those old mandatory segregation laws no longer exist. But the functional separation into geographic areas by group that achieves very much the same ethnic division outcome does exist to a major degree in many neighborhoods.

It is clear from talking to the people in those neighborhoods that basic internal forces — our own personal virtual internal ethnic magnets, in effect — tend to be the primary motivator today that creates those major ethnic concentrations.

People Feel Safer Surrounded by “Us”

It is both a conscious and an unconscious choice to live in those settings. People feel safer and people feel more secure surrounded by “us.” People like to feel both safe and secure. Comfort levels are higher for many people when everyone in immediate and relevant proximity is an “us.”

The intergroup interaction issues that drive those choices are pretty basic. People who can't relax when there is a “them” in the room can relax when no one in the room and no one in the neighborhood is a “them.”

Various psychological studies have shown that we tend to feel safer when we look up and see that the person approaching us in an urban setting on a nighttime street has a face and a skin color that looks like our own.

The book *Primal Pathways* writes about those instincts to be with “us” and explains how useful those sets of instinctive reactions have been both for our peace of mind and for our survival in many settings.

Our instinctive alarm systems and related behavior patterns still exist for each of us today because those alarms still do help people in various parts of the world survive today. For our country, the intergroup segregation issues are tied more to comfort than to survival.

Census Data Shows Major Ethnic Concentrations

The U.S. census data shows us that we do have very consistent pattern of ethnic concentration in our major cities. Anyone who doubts what I am saying should look at that data and the maps that show population by group.

Chicago has three major ethnic concentrations. The South Side has one of the largest majority Black populations in the country. A couple of other neighborhoods are also Black and they are surrounded by a large central area that is overwhelmingly Latino. Whites live mostly to the north of the city.

Boston also has a major Black concentration on the south side of the city with a major Latino population to the East and North. Whites, in Boston live on the north side of the city.

Detroit is now overwhelmingly Black. Eighty percent of the population of Detroit is Black — compared to 10 percent in 1940.

New York City, overall, is extremely diverse — but even in the heart of New York diversity, Harlem and Queens are overwhelmingly Black, Chinatown is Chinese, and the north side is heavily Hispanic.

The Bronx is very multi-racial — and currently has a relatively low number of White residents. Most of Manhattan below 125th Street, Staten Island, and major parts of Brooklyn are White.

It can be obvious as you walk through some of the streets in parts of New York which ethnic group is the majority group for that particular neighborhood. I gave a commencement address at Harlem Hospital last year. About 90 percent of the people in the room for the speech were African American.

Roughly the same percentage of the patients who I saw being cared for by that hospital were also Black. My usual security people in my old job who accompanied me to the speech were both Black. Those two gentlemen from our internal security team tended to stand out a bit in most settings around the country where I gave talks. In Harlem, my guard melded and blended into the groups completely and the only person in our little entourage who was the visible outlier in that setting was me.

Atlanta and Washington D.C. have major black neighborhoods, and they each also have major suburbs that are highly ethnically concentrated. For Atlanta, the southern and eastern suburbs are overwhelmingly Black and the Northern suburbs are White.

For Washington D.C., the suburbs to the south and east are Black, the Hispanic families are southwest of the city, and the western suburbs are largely White.

Chinatowns exist in a number of cities as well. Originally, those focused neighborhoods were mandatory living site requirements for people of Chinese descent who wanted to live in those cities. Chinese Americans were often not allowed to live in other parts of those cities.

Today, the Chinatowns still exist but living there is now voluntary. Anyone walking through any of our Chinatowns can tell just by looking at the people there that those areas generate the same voluntary ethnic concentration magnetism patterns as the other ethnically concentrated areas of their cities.

There are Japan towns in a number of cities, as well. A number of immigrant groups have created similar living patterns in various cities.

There are Viettowns in some cities. I have seen Little Koreas in several others. A number of neighborhoods in several cities have major Russian immigrant concentrations. Various other Middle Eastern and Central European groups have similar areas of ethnic focus neighborhoods in a number of cities.

People Like Living with “Us”

In a similar vein, there are a number of cities with neighborhoods that tend to have high voluntary concentrations of gay and lesbian residents. That particular information about the gender preference by neighborhood isn't available from Census Bureau data, but many people know what those cities are and most people in those cities know which neighborhoods in those cities tend to be the primary gay and lesbian neighborhoods.

We have family members who live in the Castro/Mission District border areas of San Francisco. Much of the local population in the Castro clearly has self-selected to be in that area. San Francisco takes great pride in its gay population. Again... people in each of those neighborhoods have a level of comfort that is triggered by having a sense of being surrounded by “us.”

A friend of mine from Minneapolis who is gay told me that he usually spends one week a year in San Francisco and that is the only week all year when he doesn't feel like he is living in a world of “Them.” He feels safe at a deep internal and core level in The City by the Bay. He told me he can feel his spirits lift as though they had wings when the wheels of the plane he is on actually touch down each year on the SFO tarmac.

I have personally ridden in several Gay Pride parades in San Francisco. Three of my sons have ridden on the float with me. My old company had several hundred people who march every year as a unit in that parade.

I love the incredible creativity and the positive energy that happens in that city for that gathering and for that event.

Again — the concentration of people in the neighborhoods of that city fits the pattern of people instinctively feeling a sense of comfort in being with “us” and a sense that it is good not to have a sense of being surrounded by them — regardless of who your “Them” is.

We Can Build Diversity on Our Overarching Diversity

When I first became aware of the scope and the scale of those various racial, ethnic, and gender preference neighborhoods in all of our major cities and as I thought about their reasons for existing, I actually was a bit discouraged.

I initially believed those self-segregated neighborhoods were a sign of intergroup interaction failures. I worried that those neighborhoods would be an instinct-supporting and division reinforcing threat to positive and Peaceful future intergroup interactions.

I now believe that those neighborhoods are an instinct-triggered reality that we need to live with, and I believe those neighborhoods can both give people a sense of security and can give us all a focus and context for both celebrating and appreciating our diversity.

Our diversity truly can make us stronger and better. I know that the restaurants in the major Minnesota cities where I have lived much of my life have become much more interesting with the influence of multi-ethnic immigrants to those cities. That same kind of culture blending at multiple levels makes all of our increasingly diverse cities more interesting places to live.

The fact that we have chosen as a country to live in areas of ethnic and racial concentration clearly creates a context that we will need to understand and work with in very intentional ways as we work to create a country at Peace with itself.

There Are No Multi-Ethnic Street Gangs

My sense is that we need now to learn to interact with each other from that context and in those settings.

Gangs are clearly a problem in a number of settings. One of the more negative characteristics that does exist in those ethnically focused neighborhoods that we see exist in so many of our cities is that there tends to be significant levels of street gang activity in many ethnically concentrated neighborhoods.

It is very clear that the gangs in those neighborhoods are organized entirely along ethnic lines. I have yet to find a multi-ethnic street gang or a multi-ethnic prison gang anywhere.

Let me know if anyone finds one anywhere. Tell me immediately. I will want to see why it exists and how it happened to be formed.

In a number of settings, those local street gangs now have a significant level of control over major portions of city turf for a sad array of functions. Those same gangs hold dominion over sections of many prisons — and that creates a reciprocal reinforcement and alignment power and context for the gangs with the inmates.

Again — when those sets of tribal instincts are in gear for prison gangs — anyone who crosses into the wrong turf or who triggers the wrong collective behavior for those gangs can be in horrible, damaging, and dangerous circumstances.

Some of our very worst us/them instincts are triggered by and fully flourish and flower in those gangs. Intergroup murders within the gang communities are common.

Gangs Function at a Very Primal Level

The gang behaviors function at a very primal level. Basic instinct patterns are obvious and fully activated in gang settings.

Gangs control turf. Gangs have Alpha leaders who expect gang members to be aligned. In very primal levels, gangs expect extreme group loyalty to the gang.

A gang member who tries to leave any of the gangs can trigger basic traitor instincts and be executed by the gang for making that attempt. The whole process of forming and operating those gangs is very purely primal and gives us clear and visible proof of how those instincts work when they function as a package for those purposes.

One grim local news story in Oakland a year ago said that it took 619 tons of earth last year alone just to fill the graves of last years shooting victims from that one city. Another recent article said that murders are increasing in Detroit and reported that currently 90 percent of the murders that happen in that city are unsolved.

The Detroit murders were unsolved in part because the police department had major budget and staffing problems. Those murders were unsolved in even larger part because the gangs who are involved in many of the shootings often impose a level of fear and even terror relative to anyone who might be testifying against them.

People in some settings know that if they testify against a gang member, they will be damaged or killed.

Are the Police Us or Them?

That situation is complicated significantly in many settings by the fact that the police in too many communities are perceived to be a “them” rather than an “us” for large percentages of the residents.

If the police are perceived in any setting to be “them,” people’s cooperation with the police in that setting will drop significantly. Basic intergroup instincts are very relevant at that point. When the police are “them,” then interacting with “them” makes you a traitor and interacting with “them” feels instinctively like a wrong and dangerous thing to do.

Our traitor instincts are extremely relevant in those situations.

As noted in a couple of chapters of this book and as discussed in both *Primal Pathways* and *The Art of InterGroup Peace*, we have very strong instincts to detest traitors, to punish traitors, and to never want to personally be a traitor. Traitors are executed in cultures across the planet. We tend to feel terrible, individually, if we feel like we have somehow been traitors to our “us.”

It’s hard for any of us to help the police solve murders in any setting if we feel like a traitor when we help police do any of their work.

That particular instinct to hate traitors and our sets of related behaviors relative to traitors were covered in just one page back in my 1989 version of this book. I knew then that our traitor-linked set of instinctive behaviors existed, and I mentioned those instincts very briefly as a relevant and interesting issue in the first draft of that book.

But that particular section of the book that dealt with our instincts relevant to traitors was more of a curiosity to me than a primary functional issue or a major concern when I wrote that initial draft of that book.

Over the years, as I have been continuing to study those sets of issues and as I have done some experiments in various settings with multiple groups of people, I have come to believe that those traitor-linked instincts are actually one of the most serious issues that we need to address if we want to achieve positive intergroup interactions.

I now believe that we will not be able to succeed in creating significant and needed levels of Peaceful and supportive intergroup interaction in many settings until we learn to deal very effectively — both individually and collectively — with our traitor-related instinct packages.

We Can Overcome Traitor Instincts

As I noted earlier, I went through a personal learning process, myself, on the issue of traitor instincts that was extremely useful to me.

When I realized that improving intergroup understanding would require having people from each group interacting with each other as people and not just interacting with each other as stereotyped functionalities or functionaries, and when I understood that trust would be needed between people at the individual person to person level before we could achieve adequate levels of trust at the group to group level, then I began to understand how important it is for us to deal effectively with the power of those traitor-linked instincts for both individuals and groups.

When I learned personally to see other people as people and not just to see people as stereotypes or as categories or functionaries with group labels, that traitor-related instinct package lost much of its power over me.

At this point in my life, I have managed to purge the impact of those particular traitor related instinct packages from my own thinking for almost all of my own interactions with other people.

It was not easy at first. It required putting both that instinct and the overall intergroup strategies we need to follow in order to achieve intergroup Peace in a shared context.

To achieve the overall levels of InterGroup Peace that we want and need to have, we need to become an “us.” The Dalai Lama makes the point that we each need to see and know each other people to people — person to person — in order to become a human us. I believe he is entirely correct both in that belief and in that strategy.

Knowing That Traitor Instincts Exist Is Useful All by Itself

What I have learned is that when I personally feel that the instinct telling me not to be a traitor is being actively triggered for me in my own head, I can now

recognize that particular instinct, isolate that instinct, examine the instinct, identify its trigger issues in that setting, and then I can generally defuse that instinct for my own thoughts for that situation and setting.

I can generally defuse it today because I now know that it is a pure instinct-driven response to whatever I am doing. I also now know that I am not actually doing anything of an actual traitorous intent or with traitorous consequence relative to my own group by having those contacts, and those interactions, relationships, and friendships with people from other groups.

If being a traitor means that I am doing something that actually will bring harm or do damage to my “us,” then it is wrong to be a traitor. But if feeling that I might be a traitor simply and inaccurately means that I am reaching out personally to include someone from another group in my personal sense of “us,” that does not make me a traitor.

If I am reaching out to understand and to have a human and personal relationship with someone from another group of any kind — then reaching out to that person or sets of people is not an act of treachery to my group. It is a sane, reasonable, responsible, caring, positive, and ethical thing to do.

Each of Our Groups Benefits When We Reach Out

I believe strongly that the people who are in my own basic levels of “us” should and will actually benefit in very real ways because I am reaching out and creating those levels of beneficial intergroup and interpersonal connectivity.

Those traitor-related instincts are so powerful and so relevant that people are being killed in our neighborhoods today for reaching out to someone perceived by the local gang to be a “Them.” As I said earlier, gangs kill traitors. Gangs will sometimes go to great lengths to hunt down and kill a traitor.

Gangs also tend to damage or kill people who side with the police against the gang.

It is a sad, but easy to understand reality that some people in some neighborhoods who witness a crime or a killing will not share what they have

seen with the local police both because of that gang retribution issue and because the police, in many settings, are perceived to be a “Them.”

The traitor instincts that get activated in those settings both keep people from sharing information and get people killed when they do share information.

We all need to recognize the reality to day that we have groups of people who are acting in alignment with other people from their groups in ways that can create division relative to other groups of people.

White Americans need to understand that very real intergroup anger levels exist, and that the impact of those anger levels will increase as we become more diverse as a country.

We need to have a better collective understanding of those intergroup issues and we need to take steps to keep them from damaging us today and in the immediate future.

That knowledge base will require us to look very clearly at some of the issues we face today.