

## Neal: Things We Don't See or Hear

In the 2016 presidential election campaigns, one thing in particular has been overwhelmingly obvious to me. Most members of the various communities existing within the United States have developed perceptions that detect only their particular and not the general. Essentially, we do not see the other! It seems that being American has become equal to inattentiveness, inwardly ignoring those people on the exterior of our particular communities. Us...them mentality!

In spite of our proximity, our ability to see others, or hear others for that matter, is in direct proportion to our ability to perceive beyond our immediate context. Our immediate context is basically our own field of familiarity, which is certainly not the same as proximity. In spite of the constant flux in proximal spacing, most of the time our perception varies only slightly, if at all.

Perception is quite possibly the biggest determining factor of our particular reality, yet so little effort is made by most individuals to alter it in any significant manner. Certainly, I would not make the claim that an individual's perception is an immutable part of their existence, remaining stagnant for the duration of a lifetime. However, perceptual changes are usually unintentional and externally provoked. For the most part, our particular perception is just a product or extension of the community, which we, by chance, find ourselves members. If we are from a big city, we have that city's perception. Likewise, if we are from a small-town, our perception will almost certainly resemble that. But, there are other factors, such as religion, gender, race, and economic level, to name a few. All of these factors can help to expand our perception, but they certainly can also be limiters of our perception.

As fellow philosopher, Howard McGary, once brilliantly quipped, propositions of this sort should be tested by asking, "So what!" Essentially, if individuals are not hindered in day to day living, what does it matter if their perception is never intentionally altered. Maybe perception is predetermined by nature and is a utilitarian function of life, only purposed for interpreting the world in relation to particular existences and not in generalities. Maybe we aren't supposed to see or hear the people who evade our perceptions.

Can this really be true? Is it possible that we are perfected in only the particular and therefore doomed to have imperfect relations with other cultures. Maybe, but it seems unlikely. Unlikely because, education, which definitely alters perception, is such a necessary part of being human. For the widest participation in human community it is understood that some human intervention will be required. It might even be extrapolated from this proposition that communities are perfected when they have the widest participation in communities of communities, i.e. nations.

It is well known that through education we learn language, we learn to read, and we especially learn to operate within a particular culture, all from other humans. Though, the latter is good for understanding "our" culture; however, it can

certainly stifle our ability to learn or even appreciate other cultures or appreciate the very notion of culture in general. This is because with culture, there is the subsequent creation of certain appetites and aversions. Extending from these creation we are able to make judgements or choices about what we like and what things will enter our gaze. An example of this would be when we buy a new car and it seems that many more people now own the same car. The cars that are different from our own seem to fade away. We probably would like to believe that somehow, we treat people differently. But, for most of us, this is unlikely. There are whole communities that simply fade away from our gaze.

Fortunately, it seems that the fix is simple. Learn more about other cultures! And, while formal education is certainly good, any education beyond reliance on passive experience helps tremendously. Watching movies from other cultures, eating foods from other cultures, and reading about other cultures are wonderful ways to actively create these types of educational moments. Beyond these moments, whenever the opportunity presents itself to engage other cultures it should be taken, especially with the understanding that all cultures offer something unique and wonderful to humanity. Without many of us truly taking an interest in other cultures, we will soon lose the ability to empathize with other cultures. This can set the stage for moments of dehumanization. When that happens violence is soon to follow.

2016, us...them, quite possibly it will be the year that communal relations were either repaired significantly or severed in some catastrophic way. It would be wonderful if it is the year we finally come to know what it means to be American and then really make America great. I mean wouldn't it be wonderful for everyone to realize that this is chock full of many cultures and it would be nearly impossible to make that notion go away. When we say American culture or that we are American, what do we really mean? It certainly does not mean that we are a part of a monolithic culture, nor does it have to mean that to be great. America's greatness, in the past, has relied on her ability to harness the creativity born from many different cultural streams and that will be what makes America great far into the future.

Increasing our ability to see and turning up the volume so as to be better abled to hear the voice of other cultures can only serve to make this a stronger nation. The necessity of this is wrapped in the test of which Lincoln spoke and of which we are constantly being examined. It is the test of whether this nation or any nation, so conceived, can long endure. Monuments have been built and dedicated to this purpose. Women and men have shed blood and given their lives for this cause. Certainly, we can meet the measure of this mark.