

“Echoes of the Heart”

Reflections on Life and Community Living

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Geography anyone? Forever, it seems, we Americans have been signaled out for being poor in geography. For example, ask the average American to name the countries that surround Iraq. You’ll be hard pressed to find one in ten Americans who can name all six countries.

Ask again where Burma (Myanmar) is or Sudan, nations that have been in the international news in recent times. One is in Africa, the other in Asia; but where exactly?

The problem for us here in the states is that we tend to live isolated lives, seldom learning to navigate the geographical map of the twenty-first century. Generally, across America, outside of the ethnic enclaves, we’re not much interested in other nations, languages, religions or ways of life.

In contrast, Europeans and Asians, from similar socio-economic backgrounds, boast far superior international awareness. Of course, with neighboring nations all about, most Europeans and many Asians have a head start on us in international exposure.

Take the world of professional sports, for example. Whereas most American-born athletes speak only English, it’s not uncommon for European professional athletes to speak three, sometime even four or five languages.

Still, with globalization clearly the wave of the future, as a nation, we need to make a commitment to improving our awareness of the world map and to becoming more conversant in the languages of other peoples.

Required learning. A good starting point in this is to make basic curricula in geography mandatory in both high school and college. This would go a long way in helping us catch up to other developed nations on global awareness, as the twenty-first century unfolds.

In many respects, we cannot afford to *not* do so. We cannot afford to *not* know more about the Arab/ Islamic world. We cannot afford to *not* know what cultures, for example, are *honor and shame* cultures (most predominantly Islamic nations and Japan come to mind).

A greater awareness of global geography, along with a refresher course on world history, would go a long way in helping us *put a face* on the rest of the international community, an important step in building relations of mutual understanding and peace.

The demands of the twenty-first century are going to radically alter the way the world functions and, therein, the way we Americans need to embrace the world if we are to be successful while, at the same time, being constructive global partners with our brothers and sisters across the planet.

Generally speaking, other nations and their people know far more about us than we do about them. Not that this is about winning, because it's not; but how can that be an advantage for us?

Global awareness and a new day. Like it or not, global awareness is the way of the future. It is also the way of peace and prosperity. The closer ties we share with another country, the less likely we are to move against them in an act of aggression.

Increasingly, we must find ways of putting a face on an Iranian, for example; or a North Korean or Sudanese. We must commit ourselves to learning more about the people of China and India (the two most populous nations on the earth).

The *Beijing* Olympics coming up later this summer will offer us Americans a unique opportunity to ratchet up our learning about China, whom we will most surely have as a contending global partner into the tomorrows beyond.

While we will no doubt only be allowed to see what the Chinese government wants us to see, still, ample opportunities for learning and expanding our global awareness will be readily at hand.

Peace and prosperity in the twenty-first century will have much to do with how we, the unchallenged super power in the world at the moment, choose to embrace the world. My hope is that we do it with an eagerness to learn and grow and with a humility to listen, as we gain in discernment and knowledge.