**“More than Strangers Next Door. . . Our Neighbors: The PeopleGroups.info Initiative to Research the Nations within the United States”**

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**Bryan Galloway and J. D. Payne[[1]](#footnote-1)**

The United States is the largest immigrant-receiving nation in the world, yet evangelicals know very little about the nations among us. It is estimated that hundreds of unreached people groups now reside in the United States, including many who represent unengaged-unreached people groups living in other nations.

The PeopleGroups.info Initiative, is the first of its kind, and is a partnership between the International Mission Board and the North American Mission Board (both Southern Baptist Convention agencies) to study the people groups living in the one hundred largest metropolitan areas of the United States. Findings related to these groups are posted at peoplegroups.info and made available to churches for their future disciple making activities.

The purpose of this paper is to address present progress of this massive research project and its future outcomes.

**Theological/Missiological Foundations for Diaspora Research[[2]](#footnote-2)**

Evangelicals love knowledge. This passion is good when it comes seeking to understand better God’s creation. However, in all research endeavors, the temptation is ever present to amass knowledge for its own sake, rather than lead the Church to the field for Great Commission activities. Diasporic research for Kingdom purposes must be constructed upon a theological and missiological foundation that recognizes the active hand of God in migration, the connection of such movements to the *missio Dei,* and the expectation for the Church to respond as a result of such divine activity.

The history of humanity is a history of migration. Ever since the exodus from Eden (Gen 3:23-24), men and women have been on the move. The expansion of the Europeans in the 1500s began a new era in the history of migration. While the nineteenth and twentieth centuries recorded large movements of peoples across the globe, with many from Europe to the United States, the latter part of the twentieth century and early twenty-first has revealed that migration is now more of a global phenomenon.

**Divine Maestro.** While the sociological and anthropological discussions for the migrations of people explain such movements in humanistic categories (e.g., war, persecution, education, economics), Kingdom citizens understand the Lord of the nations is working out His will in the universe, and the migration of peoples to other lands is not a serendipitous occurrence. Such is particularly true with the migration of the world’s least reached people groups to areas of the world where they can freely encounter the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Even a cursory reading of the Scriptures reveals that the God who created the heavens and earth is very much engaged with His creation. He is both transcendent and imminent. The Scriptures portray an omnipotent and omniscient God who is Sovereign over everything. While His creation may not necessarily understand His thoughts and ways (Isa 55:8-9), He is working out everything for the good of His people and His glory.

 God is at work in the world, in the good times and the bad times. He is at work through the mass movements of peoples from the rural communities to the cities, from fleeing persecution, war, and starvation to lands of security and prosperity, and from departing areas where educational and economic lift are rare to locations where such matters are assumed to be the norm.

 In his address on Mars Hill, the Apostle Paul spoke to the polytheistic Athenians about this God. His presentation included an important reference noting the Lord is Sovereign over His creation, specifically over history and people. Luke records,

And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, that they should seek God, in the hope that they might feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us (Acts 17:26-27, ESV).

 Though scholars have argued over the interpretive challenges related to this text, the point of the passage is to show that the God whom Paul proclaims is the Sovereign Lord over His creation and that people should come to Him.[[3]](#footnote-3) While the peoples of the world are scattered across the earth, they all share a common father and mother, Adam and Eve, and a common Creator.

Paul also notes that the God whom he proclaims is the Sovereign Lord over history. While the peoples of the world have migrated across the earth since the first family departed from Eden, the Lord has been in control of the times of their lives and locations of residence. His divine hand has been working through such global migrations so that man in his depraved state may come to know the grace of the imminent Creator.

 It is important to note here that the rise and fall of nations and the movements of peoples across the globe are a part of the outworking of the Lord’s plan leading to the day when His Kingdom will come (Matt 6:10) and all the nations will bow and worship Him (Ps 86:9; Isa 2:2; Phil 2:9-11). He is the God who rules over the nations (Daniel; 2 Chr 20:6; Ps 22:28), and is presently working through His Church to preach the Good News to the peoples of this world before the end comes (Matt 24:14; Mark 13:10). While the Lord does not cause evil, He does work through the wickedness of others to accomplish this plan, such as the scattering Israel among the nations (Deu 30:1), or the scattering of the Jerusalem Church at the hand of persecution (Acts 11:19-20). From the migration out of Eden (Gen 2:23-24), the Divine Maestro has been orchestrating the movement of the nations, working out His salvation history (Gen 9:1, 7; 35:11).

**Missiological Assumption.** In addition to the Lord of history being actively engaged in His creation (Psa 139; John 1:14; Gal 4:4), He has also provided a means whereby the peoples of this world will come to experience His salvation and abundant life (John 10:10). This divine means is the proclamation of the gospel by His Church (Rom 1:16; 10:14-15). Since He has commanded His followers to make disciples of all nations (Matt 28:19), the expectation is that His Church will walk in obedience to this Great Commission—whether this involves engaging the nations in other countries or our own.

In general, the twentieth century has been called the age of migration, given the large numbers of peoples leaving their countries of birth.[[4]](#footnote-4) More specifically, the Lord of the Harvest has been moving some of the world’s least reached peoples to countries where governmental opposition will not interfere with missionary labors and where obtaining a visa and the costs of travel are non-issues. The Church in the West must remember her missional nature and function intentionally, strategically, and apostolically.

While the Church must continue to send missionaries throughout the world, she must also recognize the Great Commission opportunity that is present in the United States. Something is missiologically malignant whenever the Church willing to send people across the oceans risking life and limb and spend enormous amounts of money, but she is not willing to walk next door and minister to the strangers living there. The Church must continue to go to the nations, but she must also remember that the nations have come to her.

**United States Realities Related to the Unreached**

We sometimes bypass research for the sake of engagement and often misunderstand the purpose of research. Research paints a picture of what is and at the same time implies what is not.  It goes beyond just describing the physical features of a particular area.  It, in a real sense, allows one to get a lay of the land in terms of the people in a specific locale and more specifically what people groups already have an evangelical presence, which ones are unreached, and which ones are unengaged.

An estimated 214 million people live outside of their countries of birth. On average, the United States receives approximately 20% of the annual international migrant population. No other country in the world comes close to this percentage, as noted in the following table.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Country | Estimated number of international migrants at mid-year, 2010 | As Percentage of Global Total |
| United States | 42,813,281 | 20 |
| Russian Federation | 12,270,388 | 5.7 |
| Germany | 10,758,061 | 5 |
| Saudi Arabia | 7,288,900 | 3.4 |
| Canada | 7,202,340 | 3.4 |
| France | 6,684,842 | 3.1 |
| United Kingdom | 6,451,711 | 3 |
| Spain  | 6,377,524 | 3 |
| India | 5,436,012 | 2.5 |
| Ukraine | 5,257,527 | 2.5 |

**Table 1. Countries with the Highest Number of International Migrants[[5]](#footnote-5)**

An examination of the population of the United States reveals that approximately 13.5% were born in another country. Given such global movements and time, researchers quickly come to recognize that of the 312 million United States residents (making it the third largest country in the world), a very large number of people are scatters across this nation, representing a great amount of ethnic diversity. Between 2000 to 2010, eight million international migrants came to the United States.[[6]](#footnote-6)

 **Legal Permanent Residents.** Among the legal permanent residents in 2010, the United States became home to 1,042,625 people. The following table shows some of the countries represented. A quick examination of the countries listed reveals that many are found in parts of the world with large numbers of unreached peoples. Even Mexico, representing the largest number of people, should not be written off as a “reached” nation. At the time of this writing, Mexico is home to thirty-four unreached people groups with an estimated population of 1,400,000. And, it is also home to fifteen unengaged unreached peoples comprising 352,000 people.[[7]](#footnote-7)

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Country of Birth** | **Legal Perm. U.S. Residents, ’10** |
| Mexico | 139,120 |
| China, People’s Republic | 70,863 |
| India | 69,162 |
| Philippines | 58,173 |
| Dominican Republic | 53,870 |
| Cuba | 33,573 |
| Vietnam | 30,632 |
| Haiti | 22,582 |
| Columbia | 22,406 |
| Korea, South | 22,227 |
| Iraq | 19,855 |
| Jamaica | 19,825 |
| El Salvador | 18,806 |
| Pakistan | 18,258 |
| Bangladesh | 14,819 |
| Ethiopia | 14,266 |

**Table 2. U.S. Legal Permanent Residents, 2010[[8]](#footnote-8)**

 **Students.** Western education is a coveted item by many young adults in the world. This desire has fueled the movement of many students to the United States for college, graduate, and doctoral-level education. The international student population has been increasing since the 1950s. By the 2012-2013 academic year, the United States reached a record high of 820,000 such students.

 China was the leading driver of this new number, mainly with undergraduates. Saudi Arabia had a thirty percent increase over the previous year. Almost half of all international students come from three countries: China, India, and South Korea. The following table reveals the homelands of many of the international students studying in the United States.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Rank** | **Country** | **2012-2013 Number** |
| 1 | China | 236,000 |
| 2 | India | 97,000 |
| 3 | South Korea | 71,000 |
| 4 | Saudi Arabia | 45,000 |
| 6 | Taiwan | 22,000 |
| 7 | Japan | 20,000 |
| 8 | Vietnam | 16,000 |
| 10 | Turkey | 11,000 |
| 14 | Nepal | 9,000 |
| 15 | Iran | 9,000 |
| 18 | Indonesia | 8,000 |
| 20 | Thailand | 7,000 |
| 21 | Malaysia | 7,000 |

**Table 3. Top Countries of Origin for International Students, 2012-13[[9]](#footnote-9)**

 **Refugees.** In 2010, the global refugee population reached 10.5 million.[[10]](#footnote-10) Among the top Western refugee hosting countries, Germany hosted 594,000 people, followed by the United States with 265,000. The most sought-after destination for asylum-seekers was South Africa, followed by the United States.[[11]](#footnote-11) The following table notes the country of nationality and populations of the 73,000 people who were granted refugee status to the United States in 2010.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Country** | **Population** |
| **Iraq** | **18,016** |
| **Burma** | **16,693**  |
| **Bhutan** | **12,363**  |
| **Somalia** |  **4,884**  |
| **Cuba** |  **4,818**  |
| **Iran** |  **3,543**  |
| **Congo, Democratic Republic** |  **3,174**  |
| **Eritrea** |  **2,570**  |
| **Vietnam** |  **873**  |
| **Ethiopia** |  **668** |
| **All other countries, including unknown** |  **5,691**  |
| **Total** | **73,293**  |

**Table 4. Refugee Arrivals to the U. S., 2010[[12]](#footnote-12)**

Reflecting of the movement of the nations to the United States, Jim Haney, Director of the International Mission Board’s Global Research Department, states:

There’s a sequence to seeing people groups that is not unlike that two-step miracle in Mark 8 where Jesus touched the blind man’s eyes.  Remember the miracle?  The first time Jesus touched his eyes, he saw men as trees walking around. Then, Jesus touched his eyes a second time, and the man saw things clearly.  That’s the Great Commission in a nutshell in America.  For many years, we’ve understood that there is a Great Commission — making disciples of all nations.  Today, the Holy Spirit is touching our eyes again, and like Luke’s description at Pentecost of those hearing the gospel in their own tongues, we are seeing the peoples of the world clearly — God’s bringing them to our country, and enough of them have moved from scenery status to scattered souls before our eyes.

In light of this movement, evangelicals face a great challenge in the United States—that we now know more about the people groups who reside in nations outside the United States than we do within. Hence, we face a critical need for discovering who these new people groups are. More specifically, a need exists to know 1) Who are the people groups? 2) What is their demographic size? 3) Which ones are unreached? and 4) Which ones are unengaged? Scott Peterson, Associate Director of the International Mission Board’s Global Research Department reiterates this need stating:

For far too long, evangelical believers and workers in North America have lacked a comprehensive list of what people groups are living in our midst.  Appropriately, our attention has been focused on the millions of lost people overseas among the thousands of unreached people groups who often live in hard to reach places.  In the meantime, God has brought the nations to our shores and beyond into the heart of North America.  They have dispersed into cities and towns, even into the so called Bible-belt.  But who are they?  From where did they come?  Exactly where are they located?  Such is the purpose of PeopleGroups.info, to identify the people groups who have come to North America and where they live.

Historically, mission agencies have focused their resources outside the United States. Resources in terms of field personnel have modified and refined global people group lists outside the United States to the point that strategic needs are known in terms of who is unreached and unengaged. Yet, within the United States, not only do we not have a good picture of who is here, but we also do not know where the most strategic needs exist in terms of unreached and unengaged people groups.

**The PeopleGroups.info Initiative**

Even though the PeopleGroups.info website has existed for several years, it has only become a major initiative of the International Mission Board (IMB) and North American Mission Board (NAMB) in the last couple of years. In 2012, the IMB and NAMB decided that a complete rebuild of the peoplegroups.info website was necessary. At the same time, both entities began investing personnel and financial support into the initiative. Since the middle of 2013, PeopleGroups.info has morphed into an initiative that is receiving major attention from both the IMB and NAMB.

In addition to identifying the people groups who have come to North America and their locations, the initiative is also focused on discovering strategic priority church planting needs in terms of who are the unreached and unengaged people groups. The PeopleGrousp.info website words the initiative as a:

collaboration of Southern Baptists and Great Commission Christians. . . to gather, update, preserve and visualize people group information. The goal is to multiply churches among the unreached people groups residing in the United States and Canada.

*Being a collaborative effort, the initiative is more than a mere website.* The website itself, peoplegroups.info, is only a tool for pinpointing where people groups may be found, known as Points of Interest (POIs), and for highlighting People Groups (PGs) in the United States. In a real sense, the backbone of the initiative relies on the collaboration of Southern Baptists and Great Commission Christians to identify and discover people groups. Therefore, the initiative relies upon and seeks others to do a task and to achieve the shared goals of discovering, encountering, and engaging what people groups in the United States are unreached and unengaged.

Presently, the initiative’s focus is the one hundred largest metropolitan areas in the United States. The 2010 U. S. Census revealed that approximately 85% of all foreign-born nationalities reside within the one hundred largest metropolitan areas. Those leading the initiative provide consultation, workshops, and webinar trainings in order to stimulate local metropolitan area initiatives.

These local metropolitan initiatives are then empowered to populate the website with ethnic Points of Interest (POIs), People Groups (PGs), and Resources that are being used for evangelizing, discipling, and church planting. Local city initiatives then paint a picture of the strategic people group church planting needs within their locale. Moreover, as they populate the website, they bridge a gap allowing networking and the sharing of resources with other people in other cities engaging similar or the same people groups.

Additionally, the peoplegroups.info initiative envisions that after the unreached-unengaged people groups within the United States come to Christ, they will in turn touch the lives of their families and friends in their countries of origin with the gospel message. Terry Sharp, Director/Lead Strategist for Urban Mobilization Strategies of the International Mission Board, comments:

As we grasp all the changes taking place in America, it’s important to help churches realize that the vast majority of international students, immigrants, and refugees are coming from the 10/40 window.

This in no way means we don’t continue to go overseas, but it does mean we shouldn't miss the opportunities the Father is giving His church. The nations are literally living next door.

It makes strategic and missiological sense in every way when it comes to getting the gospel to all peoples. As we are faithful to love and share the Good News, and as these students, immigrants, and refugees come to know Christ, they too will share the Gospel where we have not been able to go.

**Methodology Used to Collect the Data**

 Discovering the people groups is an unending task.  No matter how much is done, cultures are constantly changing, people groups are continually migrating from place to place, and technology and travel is ever dispersing where people make a living and rest their head.

Viewed as a collaborative effort, the initiative predominantly relies on Southern Baptists and Great Commission Christians for collecting data. The data itself centers around three tiers: Tier 1 (Examine), Tier 2 (Encounter), and Tier 3 (Engage). These tiers are not viewed as being sequential but may happen simultaneously. Moreover, it is a process of sifting through existing data (Tier 1 Examine) while at the same time directly gathering information from people groups themselves (Tier 2 Encounter).

The goals of Tier 1 (Examine) are to surface people group indicators—signs that point to the existence of people groups within a specific city or urban area—and to get that information into the hands of people who have a heart to reach out with the love of Jesus Christ.  Tier 1 (Examine) collects public data (e.g. census data, demographic, religious, consulate, immigrant, refugee, ethnic places and educational sources). These public sources then serve as a map and compass for conducting Tier 2 ([Encounter)](http://usapeoplegroups.com/ConnectingwithaPeople/EncounterTier2/tabid/204/Default.aspx) research.  While Tier 1 research reveals some people groups in a specific locale, it primarily paints a picture of ethnic races, nationalities, languages spoken and points of interest where people groups may be encountered.

Presently, Tier 1 information mapped or being mapped on the PeopleGroups.info website includes:

1. 2011 US 5 Year American Community Survey – Race, Foreign Born Population, and Language Spoken at Home
2. 2011 Canada Census (Language Most Often Spoken at Home and Foreign Born)
3. Points of Interest (Ethnic Places) – Ethnic Associations, Embassies/Consulates, Buddhist Temples, Hindu Temples, Islamic Mosques, Jewish Synagogues, Shinto Shrines, Other Sacred Places, Refugee Agencies, etc.
4. People Groups – as people groups are discovered, pinpoint markers are mapped visualizing which ones are reached /unreached and engaged / unengaged. At the time of writing this paper, plans are in the works to begin visualizing 100 plus select people groups through the use of density maps down to the census tract.

IMB personnel populate the website with the first two and assist in number four above while registered users who have gone through Editor or Moderator training are populating the Points of Interest markers (number three) and assisting to discover and populate the website with people groups (number four).

Tier 1 (Examine) does not claim to be definitive or exhaustive of all that is involved in finding people groups dispersed throughout North America.  Instead, it is only a step in sifting through the most common public sources in an effort to provide a more targeted approach to [encounter](http://usapeoplegroups.com/ConnectingwithaPeople/EncounterTier2/tabid/204/Default.aspx) people groups and conduct Tier 2 research.

Tier 2 (Encounter) seeks to discover the specific people groups who reside within specific locales.  It seeks to answer several relevant questions (the existence of a people group, their demographic size, their engagement status, their religious affiliation, and the evangelical presence, if any, among people groups) through a variety of means and methods.  Those leading the initiative provide consultation, workshops, and webinar trainings on how to make objective observations, ask culturally sensitive questions, and find the answers to these most relevant questions. Obviously, Tier 2 (Encounter) research validates or discredits the accuracy of information unearthed in Tier 1 (Examine) research.

The initiative predominantly relies upon on site individuals, field researchers, editors, and moderators to provide pinpoint markers of people groups within their specific metro area. For registered users, they are then able to view which people groups are engaged and which ones are not engaged. They also are able to have a better understanding of the strategic church planting needs among people groups within their locale or other locations within North America.

Tier 3 (Engage) is not so much a research methodology as it is the end vision of the initiative. *The initiative maintains that “If mapping and researching does not lead to engagement and church planting, then it is not good mapping and researching.”* That is the purpose of pinpointing people groups as either engaged or unengaged during Tier 2 (Encounter). Tier 3 helps evangelicals network with others who are engaging the same or similar people groups. In so doing, these very same evangelicals share evangelistic and church planting resources that are effective in evangelizing, disciple-making, leader training, and church planting among a specific people group in their metro area.

**Challenges Faced**

Since the initiative relies upon collaboration with others and the expectation that they will enter data into the peoplegroups.info website, a challenge is found regarding the administration of such activity. Conversely, this same challenge strengthens the initiative in that the data gathered comes from on-site field research. Collaboration also empowers local initiatives to take ownership in engaging the locally identified unreached-unengaged people groups. So, relying upon evangelical volunteers becomes an uncontrollable in whether new people groups will be identified and added to the peoplegroups.info website.

Another challenge of the initiative is create awareness of the changes that are taking place throughout the United States. As one participant remarked, “After being involved, I now realize how ignorant I was on the diversity and number of people groups located throughout the USA.” An involved pastor commented that the initiative “reinforces and evaluates how we go about reaching people in the USA. It means we have to change and that is not going to be easy.”

Culture often tricks us, due to subtle changes around us. As such, we often become familiar to our surroundings, and miss the neighbors who have moved into our communities. We might notice the presence of new neighbors but at the same time treat them as strangers doing our business as usual.

Probably the greatest challenge is helping those involved and the church to go beyond labeling people groups by nationality. Even within this paper, we have spoken of the nations that are now within our nation as though those nations constitute specific people groups.

There are very few homogenous nations, where the name of the nation is also the name of a people group. As an example, Japan, known for being one of the most homogeneous nations on earth, is home to the ethno-linguistic people group known as Japanese, which constitutes the majority of the country’s population.

However, not all people in Japan would identify as Japanese. Still very much in the nation of Japan, the Ryukyu Islands form a culturally important bridge between Kansai-Osaka and Taiwan. The Islands consist of two prefectures, Kagoshima and Okinawa and comprise over one hundred small subtropical islands. This area of Japan is the home of twelve distinct ethno-linguistic people groups each speaking another language at home besides Japanese and also practicing uniquely different socio-cultural-religious rituals from the majority people group.

The United States is similar. Doctors, restaurant workers, and others all cross our paths and we can easily fail to notice the differences that exist between these peoples. We can fail to realize that many are speaking as their primary language at home a language other than English. Moreover, we can fail to recognize that they are adhering to and practicing uniquely different socio-cultural-religious values. Even a casual glance at the number of points of interest already entered into peoplegroups.info reveals that major lines of demarcation do exist between peoples, all pointing to a diversity of people groups. For instance, during just the first eight months, people have entered over 5000 ethnic points of interest (e.g. 210 Islamic Mosques, 1191 Buddhist Temples, 323 Hindu Temples, etc.). Each month more ethnic points of interest are entered, all revealing diversity within specific locales.

In an article published after the 2010 decennial census was released, *US Today* stated the following,

The end of the first decade of the 21st century marks a turning point in the nation’s social, cultural, geographic, racial and ethnic fabric. It’s a shift so profound that it reveals an America that seemed unlikely a mere 20 years ago – one that will influence the nation for years to come in everything from who is elected to run the country, states, and cities to what type of houses will be built and where. (*US Today*, August 10, 2010)

We can easily assume that people from a specific nation identify themselves by their nationality and fail to see the often subtle lines of demarcation that separate one people from another. In so doing, when we engage the people and communicate the gospel we would misunderstand what they really call themselves, what language they claim as their mother tongue, and what unique cultural values they maintain and propagate within their own specific people group.

**Practical Outcomes of the Initiative Related to Disciple Making**

God is sovereign and able to lead His children to peoples and locations when they have little to no knowledge of such people (The book of Acts makes this clear.). However, throughout history, one of the means by which He often works is with information about the needs in His world. Therefore, knowledge of the lost and work of the Holy Spirit across this nation is a matter of stewardship for Kingdom citizens. Here are a few of the practical ramifications of a knowledge of the nations, and even more important the distinct people groups, in the United States.

 **Awareness and Prayer.** A lack of prayer for the people groups in this nation exists at least for the reason that a lack of knowledge about the people groups exists throughout the Church. We have heard confessions by missionaries who have returned to the states to say that they were not aware that the people group they served is living in California or Texas, or Ohio. Recently, several long-term members of The Church at Brook Hills were surprised to hear that 200 Chinese students were attending a local Christian university and that it is estimated that one hundred Saudi Arabians are in Birmingham.

 In the Dallas-Fort Worth metro area, pastors and lay people alike are shocked when they hear that almost 40 percent of the total population (6.8 million total population) speak as their primary language at home another language other than English. They are even more surprised when they learn that students and others involved in the local people group initiative have identified thus far over 250 distinct people groups.

For several years, Christians have found great value in *Operation World* and other similar prayer guides. An understanding of our present realities, provides opportunities for specific praying. One such attempt to develop a prayer guide for the people groups in the United States is *Ethnic Embrace*.[[13]](#footnote-13) This work provides a forty-day prayer guide for a different group within the United States, information on that people, and a devotional thought. While this is a very good resource (the only one of its kind to our knowledge), it is limited to only a few groups and mostly defines them by their nationalities and not people groups. Local initiatives, such those in Nashville (TN), Louisville (KY), San Francisco Bay area, New York City, and Dallas-Fort Worth metro have all developed or are all developing similar prayer and mobilization tools to cast vision for the unreached unengaged people groups within their locale. More resources like *Operation World* and *Ethnic Embrace* that would include more detailed information on people groups in the United States would be a great prayer resource.

 **Mobilization Guide.** The availability of such knowledge would allow churches, networks, and agencies to be more focused and strategic with their disciple making and church planting efforts. Knowing where the unreached peoples are living would provide a guide for how to be better Kingdom stewards with their people, time, and financial resources.

 **Strategic Integration.** Closely related to serving as a mobilization tool, knowledge of the peoples in the United States would allow for the much needed integration of strategy. Gone are the days of the dichotomy of domestic and foreign, home and abroad, North American and International. The movement of the nations over the centuries has blurred the lines between these two worlds. While the greatest physical and spiritual needs are found outside of North America, a failure of churches, networks, and agencies to integrate their Great Commission strategies is a failure to be wise stewards with the mystery of the gospel. If the one who moves people groups has called the Church to go into the all the world, and yet we fail to recognize that that includes going across the street to the Somalis next door, what does it reveal about the Church?

Reaching people groups “over here” is a way to reach them “over there.” As people move, social networks (i.e., the bridges of God) remain. Travel and technological communication is easily allowing people groups to remain in touch with their family, friends and their specific people group networks no matter where they may reside. Stories exist of those who have reached unreached peoples in the West, to then have those people return to their relatives with the gospel to plant churches. Also, some examples include churches who have reached the unreached in the West and have partnered and returned with those people to reach others in their networks.

 Strategic integration also works in the other direction. Those who have been reached in Majority World contexts are individuals and families who may be a possible means to assist churches in the West to reach the people groups living here.

**Uniting the Body of Christ.** For many years, resources such as the Joshua Project and Global Status of Evangelical Christianity (GSEC) reports from the International Mission Board have been pulling together Great Commission Christians to finish the task of making disciples of all people groups. However, no such resource exists for those Great Commission Christians living in the United States. A public resource similar to the Joshua Project and monthly GSEC reports has the potential to draw the Church around the Great Commission with a renewed sense of purpose and unity.

**Conclusion**

The Church is changed by knowledge. A glance at the last 200 years of Protestant, Evangelical, missionary expansion reveals that significant Kingdom breakthroughs often have been birthed from new knowledge about God’s world. More specifically, conversations that began addressing “hidden peoples,” later morphed into discussions and actions toward “unreached peoples.” Knowledge will bring about change.

 The United States is the third largest country in the world (in population) and receives the largest number of international migrants annually. With hundreds of unreached people groups, this land of opportunity cries out to the Church to understand the people groups living here.

 The impact, on Kingdom labors, of identifying and understanding the people groups in this country is difficult to predict. On the one hand, churches may simply collect such data and make little missional adjustments. May the Lord save us from such an outcome. On the other hand, such knowledge could lead to a seismic shift in how the global Body of Christ thinks about disciple making and church planting. Such understanding could lead to an historic shift among Evangelicals in the United States, resulting in a new face of the Church and mission unlike anything we have known since the founding of this country.

1. Bryan Galloway, D.Miss., is the Senior Research Analyst for Global Research, International Mission Board and J. D. Payne, Ph.D., is the Pastor of Church Multiplication with The Church at Brook Hills. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Portions of this section have been adapted from J. D. Payne, *The Strangers Next Door: Immigration, Migration, and Mission* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. For discussions related to the challenges of interpreting these verses see Stephen G. Wilson, *The Gentiles and the Gentile Mission in Luke-Acts* (U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 200-06 and John B. Polhill, *Acts* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1992), 373-75. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
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