Andrew Johnson
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Assignment 1

I configure my identity, first of all, as a man in the romanticized historic, chivalrous sense, a person whose honor coincides with his word, who's loyalty lies with his family and friends, and who is no stranger to self-sacrifice. Secondly, I consider myself an engineer in the broadest sense. It is my instinct to search for possibilities for improvement, both within myself and in the world around me. This was not always the case, though I did not realize it at the time. Looking back to the past, I am the sole child of a broken family, a seemingly "white trash" existence living in a small house just on the outskirts of where the affluent members of the community built their lives. My driveway, like many others on my street was decorated with a rusty car on blocks that hadn't run in more than a decade, the nearby garages and yards were filled with the refuse that did not seem appropriate to place in the trash. It is likely that this environment is the birthplace of my engineering mentality; a rich field of "spare parts" for tinkering and learning. From this beginning, I unwittingly began training my mind to see what could be, instead of what is. My world was exceptionally small at that time, as with most children I assume. I did not make time for self-reflection, my own life on the surface seemed to mirror with sufficient detail the lives of those around me. We were all white, all living in the same small town, all my peers attended the same (and only) school, all job prospects seemed to revolve around the local resort and the tourism industry. In that sense, my identity was simply one of the whole. It was not until leaving town after high school graduation that I had a grasp of the variation of opportunity and culture present throughout our own country. I saw myself becoming less "one of the whole" and more "some weird kid from a small town in Northern Michigan." Perhaps it was one of the passing feelings of growing up, but I felt as though I was a

perpetual outsider, never fully assimilating to or even identifying the core beliefs of the groups I was running with (perhaps there were no core beliefs). But as I began keeping a record of my thoughts and actions, I realized that I could not figure out how to "fit in" because I had no sense of who I was or what I wanted. I had shunned my past and tried to distance myself from it, rather than trying to understand it.

It is there that my understanding of diversity began to bloom.

It went from being a term relating to some foreign phenomenon (with regards to my hometown) to meaning people who look different, to presently the idea of people thinking differently based on each's own past experiences and perspectives. Having an understanding of myself led me to realize why it is that I think the way I do, where my opinions and preconceived notions arise from. I gradually came to realize that many of my childhood experiences stood in stark contrast to the experiences of those I encountered. This is what made my perspectives unique from those around me. Branching a little further out, if my perspectives came from a unique place, perhaps the perspectives of those around me also each came from a unique place.

What I found to be incredibly cool about differing perspectives is that they forced me to reexamine myself from those perspectives, allowing me to begin viewing my surroundings, my world in a way that I could not previously comprehend. Like a power drug, I became addicted to learning how I was viewed by others. A bit of a selfish endeavor, I admit, but as I eluded to previously, a strong understanding of one's self is a necessity to understanding personal biases and therefore the ability to see past them. I've heard this referred to as "having a good calibration," an analogy that I embrace as an engineer.