



## A Book Study:

### *America's Racial Karma* by Larry Ward, PhD

For a deeper dive:

Visit [The Lotus Institute](#), an educational non-profit rooted in mindfulness practice and founded by Dr. Larry Ward and Dr. Peggy Rowe Ward.

They offer two courses that support *America's Racial Karma*: [Earth Gate and Wind Gate](#)

[www.thelotusinstitute.org](http://www.thelotusinstitute.org)

*Many thanks to the Midwest Moon Sangha of St. Louis, Missouri,  
for sharing this book study with the [Thich Nhat Hanh Foundation](#)*

Thank you for participating in this book study. Together, we can learn to heal, as well as deepen our practice. As discussions of race can be challenging, we invite you to help us create a space in which everyone feels safe to share. To do so, we offer the following resource from [Richard Rohr's Daily Meditations](#):

*In their book [The Courage Way](#), Shelly Francis and the Center for Courage and Renewal share ideas about creating spaces of trust among people of diverse backgrounds and beliefs. They have identified eleven “touchstones” or “ground rules” to help move groups into greater trust, belonging, and understanding:*

**Give and Receive Welcome**

Extend hospitality, and presume welcome, too. This includes welcome and support for diverse perspectives, opinions, and approaches. . . .

**Be Present as Fully as Possible**

. . . Bring all of yourself—your doubts, fears, and failings as well as your convictions, joys, and successes, your listening as well as your speaking—to the work. . . .

**Extend Invitation, Not Demand**

. . . Participation by listening with care is no less a contribution than participation by speaking with care. . . .

**Speak Your Truth in Ways That Respect Other People's Truth**

. . . When you're getting to know people, it's vital to share stories across lines of difference, not to debate who's right or wrong, and not to cast blame or shame. . . .

**No Fixing, Saving, Advising, or Correcting Each Other**

. . . Good leaders point their team in a direction where they can find answers, and also instill the belief that team members have the gifts and capacity to make good decisions the leaders will support. . . .

**When the Going Gets Rough, Turn to Wonder**

If you feel judgmental, or defensive . . . ask yourself, “I wonder what brought her to this belief?” “I wonder what he's feeling right now?” “I wonder what my reaction teaches me about myself?” . . .

**Practice Asking Open, Honest Questions**

. . . Open, honest questions are the ones you cannot possibly know the answer to in advance; they are meant to elicit insights, to help people access their own resourcefulness. . . .

**Attend to Your Own Inner Teacher**

As you listen to and interact with others, pay close attention to your own reactions and responses. . . .

**Trust and Learn from the Silence**

Silence, or stillness, is a gift in our noisy world, and a way of knowing in itself. . . .

**Commit to and Maintain Confidentiality**

People are more likely to trust each other . . . when they know that their words and stories will remain with those with whom they choose to share them, and will never be passed on to others without permission. . . .

**Know That It's Possible for the Seeds Planted Here to Keep Growing**

. . . We stand in many tragic gaps in life, and recognize that our vocation lies somewhere between what is real and what can be.

## Introduction. An Invitation to Heal

### Quotes from the chapter:

Millions of years of adaptation have formed our discriminative intelligence into a complex classification machine that constantly evaluates threats to our safety and integrity.

-page 5

I know once we recognize America's racial karma as actions that continue to give birth to the notion of white racial superiority and its psychological consequences, we gain the necessary insight to change course. We will rage and grieve, but we will also begin to heal.

-page 6

I began to see how deeply embedded the idea of race is as the psychological base of modern self and society. It's entwined with our notion of ourselves surviving within a world of fear, conflict, and competition, and painful though it may be to hold on to it, without awareness, we cannot let it go.

-page 11

Our autonomic nervous systems are on high alert, flooding our bodies with the energies of fight, flight, or freeze. If we can learn to stop and look deeply into these energies, we can discover the courage, connection, and imagination to embody a new world.

-page 16

### Questions to consider. Please choose one to share about in our discussion:

1. Can you think of a time when you recognized your racialized consciousness?
2. What would a "good society" look like to you?
3. Have you had an experience in which you felt the "cycle of reactivity" and "the energies of fight, flight, or freeze" in response to race? If so, what can or did you learn by looking deeply into these energies?

### Video resources:

[https://www.ted.com/talks/heather\\_c\\_mcghee\\_racism\\_has\\_a\\_cost\\_for\\_everyone?referrer=playlist-editor\\_s\\_picks\\_of\\_2020](https://www.ted.com/talks/heather_c_mcghee_racism_has_a_cost_for_everyone?referrer=playlist-editor_s_picks_of_2020)

In this 14-minute video, Heather McGhee argues that racism hurts everyone in America.

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"Hope is not the conviction that something will turn out well but the certainty that something is worth doing no matter how it turns out." Vaclav Havel

## Chapter 1. The Turning Karmic Wheel and the Role of Intention

### Quotes from the chapter:

Our racialized consciousness and the suffering and confusion associated with it need not continue. This moment in our social history compels us to invite ourselves into a path of discoveries, learning, and practices to transform our karma.

-page 25

Unless we make a conscious choice *not* to live on automatic pilot, most of us go through our days without thinking too deeply about the motivations that drive our actions.

-page 27

When it comes to our habits around race, we must acknowledge and make what is unconscious conscious, so that we can set wise new intentions as individuals and as a collective.

-page 28

The shameless certainty of colonial thinking brings to mind the words of author Toni Morrison, who reminds us that we must understand ‘the very serious function of racism, which is distraction’ – a great lie that justifies stealing. That’s about the shortest way to say it. The great lie justified building wealth at the expense of someone else’s suffering.

-page 33

We think our crisis is the loss of happiness, but it’s the destruction of meaning. The crisis is one of people losing their sense of meaning in life and not being able to recognize their own belonging.

-page 37

We are going through the circle of karma, carried by the momentum of actions in the past that create the present. America’s racial karma is a living reality, not a concept. If we don’t face ourselves and learn how to practice looking at our actions, we’ll never heal.

-page 39

### Questions to consider. Please choose one to share about in our discussion:

1. Which of the five aspects of the racial karmic wheel (intention, manifestation, transmission, retribution, and continuation) did you first identify with the most?
2. What gives you the courage, clarity, and heart to travel into the axis of the racial wheel of karma? Or where might you find such courage?
3. Can you look at the Aryan Nation members who bombed Larry Ward’s house in 1996 in the same way that Thich Nhat Hanh looked at the pirate who raped the young girl on the boat?
4. Thich Nhat Hanh liked to say, “Most of the things we *think* will not help us face the beast in humanity.” What have you done or what could you do to face the beast in humanity?

### A video resource:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ww-1nqKj5uc>

1 hour 19 minutes; actual interview begins at 18:28.

In this interview with Kaira Jewel Lingo, Dr. Larry Ward talks about race as a window into our suffering and shares his aspiration that we will each go beyond being “a good person”. He discusses “the great lie” that our skin color makes us different and the need to understand how our legacy of racism came to be. He discusses the importance of being together with others and nature. He makes the important point that “we cannot think our ways out of this.” He argues that if we do not transform, we will not survive. He says that writing this book was part of deepening his practice.

## Chapter 2. Manifestation: The Making of a Racialized Consciousness

### Quotes from the chapter:

When we fail to recognize and forget to cultivate the seed of our shared humanity, we are in danger.  
-page 47

We must live as whole people. Deep people. Not simply defined by political conceits.  
-page 48

...it's unlikely that anyone can be magically exempt from a lifetime of racist conditioning in this system.  
-page 49

Grouping people made it easier to control them, dehumanize them, and ultimately justify the entire colonial mind.  
-page 52

Are all of us human or not?  
-page 55

### Questions to consider. Please choose one to share about in our discussion:

1. When have you felt in yourself the conceits of superiority, inferiority, or equality?
2. What images have influenced your views of people of different races?
3. How do you deal with your feelings of discomfort about racism in America?
4. Rudyard Kipling wrote the poem "White Man's Burden" in 1899:

Take up the White Man's burden –  
Send forth the best ye breed –  
Go bind your sons to exile  
To serve your captives' need;  
To wait in heavy harness,  
On fluttered folk and wild –  
Your new-caught, sullen peoples,  
Half-devil and half-child.

What came to mind as you read this poem and Dr. Ward's discussion of the White Man's Burden?

### Video resources:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VMF-kIcWjko>

In this 6-minute video, a news anchor asks white people on the street what they think about racism.

### Consider trying the Race Implicit Association Test:

<https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/takeatest.html>

## Chapter 3. Transmission: The Race Wave

### Quotes from the chapter:

The sciences and humanities of the eighteenth century were rife with the racialization of consciousness given legitimacy by religious leaders, academics, and anyone who wanted to assert their right to power.  
-page 57

Anyone shocked by American racism in 2020 needs to spend some time studying history and understand that the imprints of the past are still present in our consciousness, like seeds waiting for just a little watering to grow.  
-page 61

The successful transmission of racialized consciousness at the roots of America's foundation affects us all whether we know it or not.  
-page 62

We have spent the last five hundred years becoming so skillful in denying our atrocities and projecting the shadows of America's racial karma onto the bodies of nonwhites that we are like people suffering from traumatic brain injuries and amnesia.  
-page 62

If discomfort arises, good: it means you are alive.  
-page 62

### Questions to consider. Please choose one to share about in our discussion:

1. Are you aware of seeds of white superiority in yourself, family, and friends? In what ways?
2. How easy or hard is it for you follow Larry Ward's call to "study racism and don't look away"?
3. How easy or hard is it for you to accept the fact that "America was built on the backs of slaves and founded on the bodies of the first peoples of this land"?
4. Do you recognize America's racial karma in yourself? In what ways?
5. What do you feel when you discuss race?

### Two video resources:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-aCn72iXO9s>

In this 19-minute video, Megan Ming Francis argues that we need to understand the root causes of racism in our country and that current cure-all approaches will not solve the problem.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fr8G7MtRNik>

In this 16-minute video, Melanie Funchess shares stories illustrating the effects of implicit bias, offers us some strategies to overcome our biases, and teaches us the African word "ubuntu", meaning "I am because we are".

## Chapter 4. Retribution: Consequences, Shadows, and Portents

### Quotes from the chapter:

We are in sociological despair, meaning we are as a nation out of alignment with our depth of humanity.  
-page 66

But our racial contortion is transformable because race is a human invention—an invention that nevertheless has physical effects.  
-page 67

Americans are in social despair from the absence of genuine connection.  
-page 70

We are imprisoned in fictions, which appear to be our reality. This is the wizardry of America's racial karma passed from generation to generation through the actions of thinking, speaking, and physical behaviors. Our very constitutional history contrives it, our lived suffering testifies to it, and our cultural indifference gives permission for the retribution to continue.  
-page 74-75

### Questions to consider. Please choose one to share about in our discussion:

1. What comes to mind when you consider the places, people, and potentials in America that have not known love?
2. Are you aware of any ancestral grief of America's racial karma? In what ways?
3. Are you aware of hiding from racism in America? How do you see yourself or others doing this?
4. Can you think of images of the world you have been presented in American culture that contribute to racism? What were they?

### Resource:

Interview with Larry Ward in *Tricycle*: <https://tricycle.org/trikedaily/larry-ward-racial-karma/>

## Chapter 5. Continuation

### Quotes from the chapter:

The issue isn't that we still describe ourselves by skin color using two-hundred-year-old definitions, the issue is the *intention* behind that description.

-page 77

Whether we're talking about our skin-tone spectrum, our ethnicity, our class, or our place on the gender spectrum, if we see ourselves as belonging to a family of humanity, without anyone being higher or lower, greater or less than, such distinctions only celebrate our diversity.

-page 77

The purpose of being alive is to discover we're not separate.

-page 78

The entrenched pattern of murder and silent complicity was summed up in a Facebook post: "Always remember, they didn't make arrests because they saw the tape. They made arrests because we saw the tape.

-page 80

### Questions to consider. Please choose one to share about in our discussion:

1. How did you feel when you saw the video or heard about the killing of Ahmaud Arbery? How did you respond to those feelings?
2. Thich Nhat Hanh has said, "We are here to awaken from the illusion of our separateness." What does this mean to you? What do you think you could do to awaken from this illusion?
3. Do you have hope that we can create a new humanness in which we celebrate rather than fear or hate our differences? If so, what gives you that hope? If not, what would you need to see change to give you that hope?
4. Are you moved to not be indifferent to the trauma of racism? What motivates you?

### A video resource:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7iknxhxEn1o> 15:36 min

In this 16-minute video, Dr. Caprice Hollins discusses the problems with the way many white people talk about racism and offers suggestions for how to overcome racism.

### A resource:

[https://psychology.umbc.edu/files/2016/10/White-Privilege\\_McIntosh-1989.pdf](https://psychology.umbc.edu/files/2016/10/White-Privilege_McIntosh-1989.pdf)

*White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack* helps people understand white privilege



## Chapter 6. The Axis of the Wheel

### Quotes from the chapter:

If we are to heal our racialized bodies, hearts, and minds, and the systems of this land, first we must learn to understand the power of our minds.

-page 86

The seed of racialized consciousness and its karmic effects are part of the very fabric of American life, so much so that many don't know how to breathe outside the climate of white supremacy.

-page 88

The quality of our lives individually and collectively depends on the quality of the seeds that lie deep in our consciousness.

-page 89

The healing of America's racial karma at its deepest levels will require deeper education, skillful introspection, and wise cultivating of the seeds of compassion for self and all relations. It will require identifying the seeds of prejudice, bigotry, and indifference to racial suffering and removing the nutriments that cause them to grow.

-page 89

Our work is to heal our store consciousness of tendencies to diminish ourselves and others and to plant and mindfully cultivate our most positive human seeds.

-page 92

As a species, we are in desperate need to learn to recognize when our natural tendencies for self-cherishing are hijacked by the three poisons of greed, hate, and delusion. If we don't, we will continue to sow seeds of racialized consciousness in the world.

-page 93

### Questions to consider. Please choose one to share about in our discussion:

1. If you are a white person, do you feel you are able to do the inner work to heal racialized suffering? If so, what supports you in this work? If not, what could support you?
2. What are some strategies you use or could use to water seeds of equanimity and compassion rather than seeds of separateness and indifference?
3. What nutriments allow the seeds of prejudice, bigotry, and indifference to grow in you?
4. Have you seen mana grab at your store consciousness to maintain a sense of separate self? What happened? How did you react? How would you like to be able to react?
5. Have you ever seen your natural tendency for self-cherishing hijacked by greed, hate, or delusion? What happened? How did you react? How would you like to be able to react to such situations?
6. Was there a time when you recognized that the conceit of American virtue was wrong? How did that make you feel?

### A video resource:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h7mzi0cVL0Q>

In this 20-minute video, Robin DiAngelo explains that white people often have a hard time talking about race because we are taught the good/bad binary of racism, rather than realizing that racism is something we grow up with.

## Chapter 7. Crossing Mercy's Bridge: Healing the Wounds of Time

### Quotes from the chapter:

Mercy's bridge rests on the solid foundation of human evolutionary resilience, brain neuroplasticity, and spiritual awakening.

-page 96

Like it or not, we as individuals acquiesce to America's racial karma daily.

-page 97

The spiritual and social work of healing America's racial karma requires a new conscious intent of living together in individual and collective safety, wellness, justice, and profound meaning.

-page 98

In my meditations and reflections, I realized that in the undiscovered self is the undiscovered society; this means that our external life is intractably bound to our inner life. This is the underlying insight of this book.

-page 104

To overcome injustice, we must not lose our centeredness, our spiritual resilience, and most importantly, not our capacity to respond with wisdom, compassion, and action in creating a new world.

-page 120

### Questions to consider. Please choose one to share about in our discussion:

1. Do any of the five aspects of post-traumatic growth feel true to you and your experiences?
2. Which of the Help Now! strategies appeal to you to remain emotionally resilient? If you have ever used one of these strategies, what was that like?
3. Which of the practices Larry Ward describes would you like to try?
4. Do you have a person, place, activity, or memory that can serve as a resource to you to empower you with a sense of safety, stability, strength, inspiration, creativity, and support?

### A video resource:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4t-cGRhXbM8>

In this interview between Larry Ward and Rhonda V. McGee (actual discussion starts at ~5:07), Dr. Ward talks about the idea that we are constantly afraid and that we need to feel safe so that we can transform. He talks about his daily practices, the three doors of liberation (signlessness, impermanence, and emptiness), and his future projects.

## Chapter 8. The Call to Ancestorship

### Quotes from the chapter:

It is time to go to the river and be washed and cleansed in the holy flows of the energies of love and kindness, compassion, joy, equanimity, and imagination, trusting that the great river will carry us home.  
-page 121

The gate of ancestral grief is being flooded in all of us. Only by practicing and acting well now can we heal our ancestral trauma and become ancestors worthy of being descended from in the future.  
-page 122

I am a drop in the ocean, but I'm also the ocean. I'm a drop in America, but I'm also America.  
-page 122

Don't act like you can't take charge because it's obvious to me that the principalities and powers who are supposed to be in charge of this land at this moment are absolutely incapable. So stand up!  
-page 125

### Questions to consider. Please choose one to share about in our discussion:

1. What emotions have you felt in response to racial hierarchy in America? How have you felt them in your body?
2. If you could talk to one of the people at the founding of this country who thought we could never live together peacefully, what would you like to say to them?
3. Do you have a mantra that you find helpful in healing? Would you like to adopt one of Larry Ward's mantras?

### Resources:

<https://www.rbc.com/diversity-inclusion/that-little-voice.html>

This 2-minute video encourages people to speak up about inclusion.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wf9QBnPK6Yg>

In this 4-minute video, Joy De Gruy describes an event in which someone used their privilege to address a racial injustice.

<https://arisesangha.org/contemplations-on-the-five-mindfulness-trainings/>

This is a version of the Five Mindfulness Trainings that focuses on racial justice, created by Marisela Gomez and Valerie Brown and adopted by the Awakening through Race, Intersectionality, and Social Equity (ARISE Sangha).