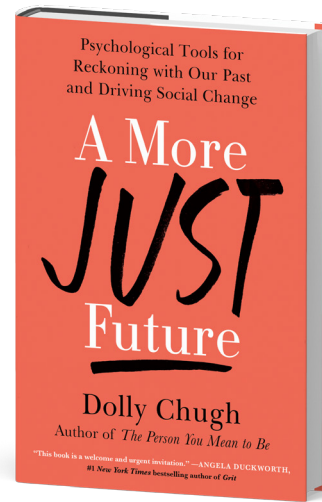


# Instructors's Guide for A More *JUST* Future

Psychological Tools for Reckoning  
with Our Past and Driving Social Change

by Dolly Chugh



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## BOOK SUMMARY

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*A More Just Future* confronts the deeply rooted, seemingly intractable problem of racism in America, and the pervasive denial, minimizing, and whitewashing of racism in national narratives. These problems are not new, but they feel urgent in light of the 2020 election, the ongoing coronavirus pandemic, and the burgeoning racial justice movement.

Author Dolly Chugh—a Harvard-educated, award-winning social psychologist at the NYU Stern School of Business—says Americans need to change how we view our country and ourselves.

Chugh, an expert in the psychology of “good” people, says we need to change the stories we tell about America and Americans. We must become more critical and mindful consumers of history, even if it hurts. Especially if it hurts. Ignoring, denying, or whitewashing history will only exacerbate our present problems—and hamper our ability to shape the future.

The author says that we don’t have to like America to love America. We don’t need to choose between wokeness and patriotism. We can hate American racism and injustice and still love America. Ultimately, her nonpartisan stance combines a conservative patriotism with a progressive critique of injustice.

She invites readers to join her emotional journey to the heart of America. She challenges readers to be courageous, curious, skeptical, and open-minded as they engage “horror and shame.” She exhorts readers to interrogate conventional wisdom, reject myths, and question their own beliefs. She encourages readers to view guilt and grief as vehicles for growth. Ultimately, she resists cynicism and espouses fierce hope about America and its future.

The author empathizes with readers’ struggles. She admits her knowledge gaps and celebrates belated discoveries and epiphanies. Her humility and optimism bolster the inclusivity of her message. Essentially, she tells readers: “I can do it. You can do it. We can do it.”

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## INSTRUCTORS' GUIDE AUDIENCE

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This guide is intended for instructors whose courses include:

- Diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging topics;
- Law, public policy, social work, education, medicine/health care, criminal justice, urban planning, environmental science, and other fields with racial disparities in outcomes;
- English, Art History, Film Analysis, Music Theory, Theater, Religion, Linguistics, or any subjects that entail curation and analysis of the arts and humanities;
- Corporate training in sports business, branding, and marketing regarding the historical roots of team mascots, imagery, and names;
- African-American Studies, Asian-American Studies, Native American Studies, Gender Studies, and any other academic discipline centering a marginalized community;
- Sociology, psychology, economics, and other social sciences from which the research in the book is drawn; and
- History—especially American History

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## LEARNING GOALS

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In *A More Just Future*, readers will learn how to:

- 1.** Dismantle historical myths and seek historical truths
- 2.** Reject core American vices and embrace core American virtues
- 3.** Develop emotional resilience amid threats to their identity and values
- 4.** Cultivate empathy for victims of oppression and injustice
- 5.** Build the courage and persistence to fight for equality and justice

After reading *A More Just Future*, readers will become more:

- 1.** Discerning
- 2.** Self-aware and emotionally secure
- 3.** Compassionate toward others
- 4.** Open to engaging in civic and political life

After reading *A More Just Future*, readers will feel more:

- 1.** Hopeful
- 2.** Inspired
- 3.** Confident
- 4.** Resilient
- 5.** Empowered

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## ABOUT THIS GUIDE'S AUTHOR

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Keith Meatto is a writer, editor, and educator. His writing has appeared in the New York Times, the Forward, the Millions, the Texas Observer, Guernica, Mother Jones, and elsewhere. He teaches academic writing in the social impact core program at NYU Stern School of Business and creative writing in the prison education program at Bedford Hills Correctional Facility and Taconic Correctional Facility. He holds a BA from Yale University and an MFA from the New School.

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# PROLOGUE: SO MUCH TO UNLEARN

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## OVERVIEW

Americans are reckoning with racism: past and present. In this fractious time, we must reject our whitewashed, sanitized popular history in order to heal our national wounds and build a kinder, more equitable future. The author—a psychologist who specializes in the psychology of “good” people—wants to give readers the emotional skills to unlearn and relearn history.

## SUMMARY

The author recalls reading *Little House on the Prairie* to her daughters and vacationing to visit the places where the stories occurred. At the time, she felt like a model parent for teaching her children American history and values. A decade later, she realizes she did her kids a disservice by valorizing the Ingalls family and their individual virtues, while ignoring their role as colonizers and beneficiaries of genocide and their tacit participation in an unjust system. In essence, she fed her daughters whitewashed history that they would later need to unlearn.

The author invites readers to join her in the journey of unlearning simplistic and sanitized historical narratives that glorify European settlers and white culture at the expense of indigenous and nonwhite people. In essence, readers must **decolonize** their minds. Why? If Americans do not reckon with past atrocities, we cannot grasp present injustices or build a more just future.

As a psychologist, the author focuses not on history, but on the emotional labor of confronting history, which includes feeling guilt, grief, and shame. Her previous book, *The Person You Mean to Be*, was a guide for how to be a better person. *A More Just Future* is a guide for how to be a better American.

She invites readers to join her in rejecting mental frameworks that perpetuate injustice. Readers must reject **the good guys win** mentality, aka **system justification theory**, in which people believe the world is good, fair, legitimate, and desirable, even if the facts say otherwise. Readers must also reject **magical thinking**, the childish belief that injustice will resolve itself without concerted effort.

The author rejects the polarizing narrative that divides America into “patriots” and “wokesters.” The daughter of immigrants from India and mother of American-born children, she identifies as a patriot who recognizes the nation’s flaws, an ideal she later calls **gritty patriotism**. She invites all Americans—regardless of race, ethnicity, immigrant status, or political affiliation—to join her in the project of reckoning with our past.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How do you feel about America? Do you identify as a patriot? Woke? Both? Neither? Why?

- 2.** What are “American” values and ideals? To what extent does the country live up to these values and ideals?
- 3.** How did you learn about American history at school, at home, and via popular culture? How has your understanding of American history changed as an adult?

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# CHAPTER 1: SEE THE PROBLEM

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## OVERVIEW

History is biased, just as sports fans are biased and memory is biased. Most people consume history uncritically. To actively confront history, we should recognize its inherent biases and combat those biases by embracing multiple perspectives.

## SUMMARY

American students learn whitewashed American history. Americans learn our history as a “greatest hits” album that emphasizes the country’s virtues and triumphs and ignores or downplays the nation’s vices, including slavery, genocide of Native Americans, Japanese-American internment, and structural racism. One source of the problem: American history textbooks do not accurately reflect American history. Instead, textbooks are the flawed by-product of compromises among historians, politicians, and publishers.

To understand our past, we need to unlearn and relearn what we learned in school. Only then can we accurately understand our present and shape our future.

Understanding human psychology can help us confront history more critically. The author invites readers to reject three common mental illusions: **confirmation bias**: seeing what you expect or want to see; **hindsight bias**: viewing past events as inevitable; and **home team bias**: subconsciously favoring people and/or groups with whom you identify, as sports fans irrationally favor their teams.

The author encourages readers to avoid the **patriot’s dilemma**, a version of home team bias in which people who love their country are paradoxically the most resistant to making it better.

To face our past, we might learn from Germany, where the national culture and educational system confront Nazism and the Holocaust in a more direct, sustained way than American students confront slavery and racism. We might also learn from South Africa, where students learning about apartheid tend to fall into three camps: deniers, minimizers, and those who grasp apartheid’s horrors. Finally, we might learn from **critical race theory**, an intellectual framework that studies how racism is embedded in systems, policies, and laws.

Ultimately, we must never forget that history is a narrative, not a set of immutable facts. Like all stories, history has a perspective, which means history is always biased. All too often, history is written by the victors, that is, people in power seeking to justify and perpetuate their power. Responsible teachers and students of history must reject monolithic narratives. Instead we must seek multiple perspectives.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Reflect on your education. Can you remember something specific that you learned in school that you later learned to be untrue, partially true, or more complex than you had once believed?
2. Reflect on your behavior at home, work, or in your community. Can you remember an example of when you exhibited confirmation bias, hindsight bias, and/or home team bias?
3. How should schools teach about race and racism in America? Who should decide? By what standards?
4. Why did the author include South Africa under apartheid and Nazi Germany in a book about American history?

## ACTIVITIES

1. Write a personal history, family history, or community history.
2. Write a reflection on the above experience of being a historian. What did you include and exclude? Which perspectives did you represent? What is not well remembered or documented?
3. Write a reflection on how the challenges you experienced would grow exponentially if the assignment were to capture the history of an event affecting not just you, your family or your community, but an entire society.

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## CHAPTER 2: DRESS FOR THE WEATHER

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### OVERVIEW

Americans love history, especially history that affirms our identities and makes us feel good. The popular PBS show *Finding Your Roots* epitomizes the pleasures and perils of pursuing personal and national history. We need to acknowledge the emotional toll of facing unpleasant history that doesn't match our self-conception. Just as we dress for the weather, that is, wear the right clothes for the climate, we need to prepare ourselves emotionally to confront our history.

### SUMMARY

Learning about history is as much emotional as it is intellectual—maybe even more emotional.

Once we see the problem—that we have learned a whitewashed version of history—we need to dress for the weather, in other words, prepare for the emotions that may arise when we confront our nation's actual history. If we expect to feel pride, shame, guilt, and grief, we won't be overpowered by these emotions. Being emotionally stable and secure in our egos will help us grapple with history—and ultimately do the necessary work to learn from history.

Ben Affleck and Anderson Cooper offer two contrasting models for how to dress for the weather. Both men appeared as guests on the PBS show *Finding Your Roots*, where historical evidence revealed that their ancestors had enslaved people. Affleck pressured the network to cut the discovery from the broadcast and reveal only his admirable ancestors. Cooper faced the truth and millions of viewers watched him express disgust at the news of his ancestry, without denying or minimizing the problem. Ironically, Affleck took the news personally and denied responsibility, while Cooper didn't take the news personally and accepted responsibility.

The author admires Cooper's stance and finds Affleck's behavior psychologically unsurprising. Americans are not ahistorical, but selectively historical. When engaging with history, they are most curious about personal history, family history, and identity group history. They feel pride in their ancestors' triumphs, that is, they **bask in reflected glory**, just as sports fans take credit for their teams' victories. They also seek **nostalgia**, positive accounts of their ancestors that make them feel good about themselves. Conversely, when they learn negative information—such as a slave-owning ancestor—they feel personally threatened, which may lead to shame, guilt, and defensiveness.

Affleck and Cooper reflect a larger social phenomenon. When white people feel a threat about their whiteness, they tend to adopt one of three strategies: **deny, distance, or dismantle**. In this case, Affleck denied and distanced himself, while Cooper took steps to dismantle by acknowledging the truth.



To help readers face history more like Cooper and less like Affleck, the author offers simple suggestions grounded in academic research.

1. Readers should affirm their values to prevent feeling overwhelmed or threatened by negative information.
2. Readers should know that people are poor at predicting future feelings. Humans can tell a root beer from a root canal, but overestimate the joy of the beverage and the pain of the dental work.
3. Learning and unlearning history may be painful, but not as painful as we fear. When we do feel guilt and shame about the past, those emotions can help inform our decisions about how we might shape the present and the future for the better.

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. List your social identities. How strongly do you identify with various identity groups? How do you feel when a member of your identity group does something admirable? How do you feel when a member of the group does something deplorable? To what degree do you **bask in reflected glory** or engage in **nostalgia** about your social identity groups?
2. What do you know about your ancestors? What are your sources? How much of that knowledge is positive? How much is negative? Do you **bask in reflected glory** about your ancestors? Engage in **nostalgia**?
3. How would you feel if you learned that someone in your family had enslaved people? Why? What would you do? Why?

### ACTIVITIES

4. Watch video clips from *Finding Your Roots*. How do celebrity guests respond to revelations about their ancestors? How would you characterize the emotions they display in words and gestures? Do the guests display any of the behaviors discussed in this chapter? To what extent do they seem emotionally prepared for the revelations? What does the show suggest, imply, or reveal about the project of confronting our history?
5. Write a list of 5–10 core values. Read them aloud every day for a week. Do you notice any difference in your life? Write a reflection on the experience of **values affirmation**.

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## CHAPTER 3: EMBRACE PARADOX

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### OVERVIEW

America is a nation of contradictions: our professed values don't always align with our actions. People crave consistency and resort to binary thinking. But we don't need to choose between loving or hating America. Instead of adopting an **either/or mindset**, we should adopt a **both/and mindset**. We should **embrace paradox**, inconsistency, and nuance—however uncomfortable. Perhaps counterintuitively, adopting a paradox mindset will deepen our love for our country.

### SUMMARY

The author recounts belatedly learning about Juneteenth, the holiday commemorating the end of slavery in Texas more than two years after the Emancipation Proclamation. She considers Independence Day and Juneteenth as seemingly opposed holidays that represent our national **paradox**: a country of egalitarian principles founded on slavery. She rejects the proposition that Americans must celebrate either Independence Day or Juneteenth. Instead, she says we should celebrate both holidays: July 4 celebrates our purported ideals, while sidelining our wrongs. June 19 celebrates our wrongs belatedly corrected to match our ideals.

Her larger point: embracing **paradoxes** can help readers accept contradictions in American history. We need not deem America either great or terrible. America is both great and terrible. Our ancestors did both honorable and horrible things.

New Orleans mayor Mitch Landrieu successfully embraced the **paradox mindset**. After Hurricane Katrina, Landrieu asked jazz legend Wynton Marsalis to support his efforts to rebuild the city. Marsalis agreed—if Landrieu would help remove the city's prominent Confederate monuments. Landrieu could have adopted binary bias: either rebuild the city or remove the monuments. Instead he led a massive effort to rebuild the city and tear down the monuments.

According to Wendy Smith, coauthor of *Both/And Thinking: Embracing Creative Tensions to Solve Your Toughest Problems*, Mayor Landrieu:

1. Accepts tensions between opposing forces, or dualities, as a natural state
2. Reframes the central questions of the problem
3. Establishes boundaries to preclude a nonproductive free-for-all
4. Exhibits open-mindedness toward new ideas

Adopting a paradox mindset is easier said than done. Human beings are psychologically wired to crave consistency and coherence. The author herself self-identifies as a “consistency junkie.” So what to do? Rather than expecting consistency, we can train ourselves to expect inconsistency.

Why? Research shows that adapting a paradox mindset has many benefits. It

can enable resilience and lead to creativity. It can reduce anxiety and discomfort. It can relieve the emotional burden of trying to resolve contradictions. When we adopt a paradox mindset, we develop mental agility, cognitive flexibility, and increased tolerance for ambiguity—and coping mechanisms for life’s challenges.

If we embrace the paradox mindset, we can love this country and critique it. We can honor—and be honest about—our past.

## **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

- 1.** Do you celebrate July Fourth? Do you celebrate Juneteenth? How? Why?
- 2.** Should monuments to the Confederacy be removed or not? Why?
- 3.** How does America live up to and/or fall short of its ideals?

## **ACTIVITIES**

- 1.** Identify a specific conflict you wish to resolve in your personal life, workplace, or community. How might you address or mitigate the conflict by adopting a both/and mindset?
- 2.** Try the above activity in pairs. Each person must make suggestions for resolving the other person’s conflict.
- 3.** Explore the Southern Poverty Law Center’s Map of Confederate Memorials. What do you find surprising? What resonates? Why?

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## CHAPTER 4: CONNECT THE DOTS

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### OVERVIEW

Today's problems have deep historical roots. The past informs the present more than most people realize. American racism is deeply embedded in history. The less history you know, the less accurately you can understand the present. People are psychologically wired to downplay the past and overemphasize the future. To connect the dots between past and present, we should: **1.** Resist nostalgia. **2.** Question existing disparities. **3.** Embrace multiple perspectives. **4.** Be curious about why things are the way they are.

### SUMMARY

The less we know about the past, the less we will understand its impact on the present. Yet humans are psychologically wired to downplay the past and overplay the future. We must counter these tendencies to connect the dots between past and present.

Many people subscribe to the **long time ago illusion**, the incorrect perception that events in the past are more temporally distant than they actually are—and thereby less relevant to the present. To counter this illusion, the author offers several examples.

- 1.** Ruth Bonner, ninety-nine years old, is the daughter of a man born into slavery.
- 2.** Ruby Bridges, who desegregated schools in 1960, is alive and younger than Oprah Winfrey.
- 3.** Ina McNeil, Chief Sitting Bull's great-great-granddaughter, who was forced to attend an abusive Indian boarding school, is still alive and well.
- 4.** The infamous Tuskegee experiments ended in 1972, when the author was in kindergarten; their legacy includes some African-Americans' distrust of the coronavirus vaccine,

The 1619 Project offers a master class in countering the **long time ago illusion** and connecting the dots between past and present. *The New York Times* multimedia series argues that the seminal moment in American history occurred not in 1776, but 1619, when the first enslaved people arrived. Nikole Hannah-Jones, the project's creator, writes: "Out of slavery—and the anti-black racism it required—grew nearly everything that has truly made America exceptional: its economic might, its industrial power, its electoral system, diet and popular music, the inequities of its public health and education, its astonishing penchant for violence, its income inequality, the example it sets for the world as a land of freedom and equality, its slang, its legal system and the endemic racial fears and hatreds that continue to plague it to this day."

In a noted psychological study, black participants scored higher than white participants on a "black history" quiz and were more likely than white participants

to detect systemic racism in the present. The **Marley Hypothesis** suggests that “ignorance of racism in the past leads to denial of racism in the present.”

The past influences the present in variegated and profound ways. Epigenetic research has found that people can literally inherit trauma from parents, grandparents, and ancestors. One study found that white people living now in counties and states with a higher proportion of their population enslaved in 1860 had greater anti-black implicit bias. While slavery no longer exists, the underlying prejudices and structural inequalities persist. Similarly, Richard Rothstein’s book *The Color of Law* reveals how contemporary residential segregation is the result of historical government action. Even with new laws and policies, housing segregation—and its by-product, wealth inequality—persists.

Unfortunately, people are psychologically wired to minimize the past. We feel more intense emotions about the future than we do about the past. Psychologist Eugene Caruso calls this phenomenon a “wrinkle in time.” Our minds are better at apprehending things that are familiar, nearby, current, and concrete than things that are unfamiliar, distant, past, and abstract. This concept of **psychological distance** makes it easy to assume the past was a long time ago and hard to connect the dots between then and now.

To help readers connect the dots between past and present, the author offers four strategies.

1. Reject the seduction of nostalgia. When you hear gauzy accounts of the past, ask who did not benefit from those supposedly good times.
2. Think critically about disparities. Rather than normalizing disparities, ask why they exist.
3. Seek different perspectives on the same event. Seek not only the views of the victorious or powerful, but also the views of the defeated or powerless.
4. Be curious about why things are the way they are. How did a company get its name? How did a town declare a holiday? How did a family adopt a tradition? Etc.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How does your personal history shape the person you are today?
2. Who have been the most influential people in your life? Why?
3. What were the most significant events in your life? Why?
4. What were the most consequential choices you made? Why?

## ACTIVITIES

1. Interview multiple family members about the same event. How do their accounts differ?
2. Take the [Harvard Implicit Association Test](#). What do you find surprising? Revealing?
3. Explore the [1619 Project](#). What stories resonate? Why?

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## CHAPTER 5: REJECT RACIAL FABLES

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### OVERVIEW

Humans are storytelling animals. We love simple, feel-good stories with clear heroes, villains, and morals. Our grasp of history is hampered by stories devoid of context, complexity, and nuance. Case in point: Rosa Parks. Everyone knows her name and her most famous action, but few people know the full story. We must be vigilant and spot and **reject fables**. We must adopt a skeptical attitude toward what we think we know about history.

### SUMMARY

Everyone knows the Rosa Parks story: An elderly black woman, too tired to stand, refused to yield her bus seat to a white man. Her arrest sparked the Montgomery Bus Boycott, which fueled the triumph of the civil rights movement.

There's only one problem with this story: it's a **fable**. The author recalls her "surprise and embarrassment" when she learned the full story of Rosa Parks, namely that her famous act of civil disobedience was the culmination of her lifelong activism. The simplified fable ignores the protracted struggles of the movement. The fable also suffers from hindsight bias, which suggests that the outcome was inevitable, which it definitely was not.

Such fables are problematic because when we subscribe to fables, we:

1. Misunderstand how change occurs and our agency in driving change.
2. Overweigh the impact of heroes, absolving individual responsibility.
3. Expect too much from modern-day heroes.

When learning about history, we need to spot and reject fables lest they misguide us about how to handle complex situations. The author provides three red flags that often characterize fables

1. **Clear cause and effect.** When we ascribe simple causality, we ignore the larger context. Rosa Parks wasn't the only person in the civil rights movement; her civil disobedience was part of a sustained and protracted struggle.
2. **Flawless heroes.** When we romanticize historical figures, such as the founding fathers, and ignore or downplay their flaws, we make it more difficult to accurately grasp history and its present-day repercussions.
3. **Good guys beat bad guys.** When we tell simple stories of good triumphing over evil, we ignore the messier, less palatable truth. For example, most people of the time did not support the civil rights movement. Martin Luther King and Muhammad Ali were far less popular in their time than they were in retrospect. Again, we see **system justification**, which sees history as inevitable and rejects change to the status quo in the present.

The author shares the fable of her own life. The daughter of Indian immigrants, she grew up believing in the idea of America as a "nation of

immigrants” who welcomed her family to pursue the American dream of socioeconomic mobility. Later, she learned that the landmark 1965 immigration bill was intended to pay lip service to diversify, but effectively preserve the status quo, that is, white, European immigrants. Ironically, the law opened the floodgates for brown and black immigrants from Africa and Asia, including the author’s parents. Furthermore, her community has failed to acknowledge their indebtedness to the civil rights movement, subscribed to the “model minority” fable, and perpetuated the meritocracy fable. In essence, they have “reinforced the very forces who opposed our presence in the first place.”

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Who are your heroes? Why? What qualities make them heroic? What are their flaws?
2. What’s the difference between history and fable?
3. Why are fables useful? Why are fables perpetuated? Why are fables dangerous?

## ACTIVITIES

1. **Fable hunting.** The author writes, “Once we start looking for fables, we will see them everywhere, waving their red flags.” Keep a running list of fables you encounter in your daily life: at home, in the news, on social media, at work, in your community.
2. **Fable rejecting.** Choose one fable from your list and research alternative perspectives.

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## CHAPTER 6: TAKE RESPONSIBILITY

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### OVERVIEW

Americans must **take responsibility** for our history, just as homeowners take responsibility for their homes. We should change our language to reflect our values. We should make public apologies for slavery and other historical atrocities. We should compute what reparations are owed. We should resist using pragmatism (or perfectionism) as an excuse for inaction.

### SUMMARY

To take responsibility for systemic racism, we can change names, modify language, offer apologies, and make reparations.

**Names matter.** When Jim Birch became general manager of Dixie Beer, his mission was to revitalize a languishing brand with a long history. Doing market research, he realized that the brand name “Dixie” suggested the Confederacy, white supremacy, segregation, and slavery. In response, Birch spearheaded the effort to change the company name to Faubourg. While changing an iconic brand name might have seemed risky, Birch believed otherwise. Ultimately, the new name resonated with customers, especially black customers, who expressed gratitude, and catalyzed a broader approach of community engagement.

**Language matters.** In *Caste*, Pulitzer Prize–winning historian Isabel Wilkerson uses “upper caste” to describe white Americans and “lower caste” to describe black Americans, arguing that the linguistic shift will lead to a mental shift. Historian Edward Baptist uses “labor camps” instead of plantations and “enslavers” and “enslaved people” as opposed to “slave owners” and “slaves.”

**Apologies matter.** Research shows that apologies are received not as looking backward but as a commitment for the future. The queen of England offered sympathy for England’s role in the famine in Ireland. The Vatican apologized for its persecution of Galileo and its inaction in the Holocaust. The Australian government apologized for the harm done to indigenous peoples. The U.S. government has apologized in some form for its maltreatment of Japanese-Americans, Native Americans, and the Tuskegee syphilis study victims. Still, the United States government has yet to apologize for slavery, Jim Crow, and lynchings, let alone pay reparations.

**Reparations matter.** Evanston, Illinois, was the first city in the United States to pay reparations to the descendants of enslaved people. While the process was flawed, they should be commended for taking action. Slavery was economic exploitation, which can be quantified.

**Warning:** Changing language and making apologies are necessary, but not sufficient. We should resist the temptation of **moral licensing**: congratulating ourselves and declaring the work done.



## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How has your language evolved over time? Are there words you once said but no longer say? Which words? Why?
2. Should the United States government formally apologize for slavery? Should the U.S. government pay reparations to the descendants of enslaved people? Why or why not?
3. Should universities, churches, and corporations and other institutions with historical ties to slavery make amends? How?

## ACTIVITIES

1. List 10 brands or products that you consume on a regular basis. Choose one and research the company's corporate responsibility and track record on social justice issues. Are you now more or less likely to consume the company's products? Why?
2. Read "[Case Study: When Your Brand Is Racist](#)," *Harvard Business Review*, November–December 2020.
3. What were the mascots for the schools you attended (high school, college, graduate school)? What are the mascots for the school district in the city or town where you live now? What are the mascots for your local/favorite college, amateur, and professional sports teams?

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## CHAPTER 7: BUILD GRIT

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### OVERVIEW

Actor-activist George Takei exemplifies a key goal of this book: loving America and confronting its flaws. His family was imprisoned in Japanese internment camps, yet he is a fierce patriot. His love for America is **love with a broken heart**: mature, discerning, and deeper than blind patriotism. American exceptionalism is a form of entitlement: Americans feel we deserve a country that's easy to love. But to heal our country, we must do the hard work of facing and learning from our history. To do that work, we must employ "grit"—passion and perseverance in pursuit of a meaningful, long-term goal.

### SUMMARY

The author interviews George Takei, the Star Trek actor who has become a social media influencer for his humor and political views. During World War II, George and his Japanese-American family—all American citizens—were placed in internment camps, along with 120,000 people of Japanese ancestry, 11,000 people of German ancestry, and 3,000 of Italian ancestry. Three years later, they were released, homeless and jobless.

The author imagines a present-day scenario in which the United States and India go to war and she and her Indian-American family—all American citizens—are imprisoned. She does so to overcome the **long ago illusion** and empathize with George Takei and others.

Takei's reflections on his family history exemplify key ideas in this book. He **embraces the paradox** of Franklin Delano Roosevelt as a "great president" who nevertheless imprisoned his family and thousands more. He **connects the dots** between internment camps and contemporary treatment of undocumented, immigrants, and nonwhite. He **rejects fables** of idyllic internment camps. His public efforts to educate the American public about the internment camps—via speaking engagements, his bestselling memoir, a museum, and a Broadway musical—recalls the **Marley Hypothesis**, in which ignorance about the past leads to avoidance of contemporary problems.

The author wonders how Takei can love America despite his history. She ascribes his attitude to grit, that is, passion and perseverance for long-term and meaningful goals, as defined by psychologist Angela Duckworth. The author dubs Takei a gritty patriot, someone who views patriotism as a project, not an entitlement, the belief that one deserves more than others.

Americans feel entitled to an easy love of country. The author suggests that loving our country does not mean that we always like it. Instead we should emulate George Takei, who has the agency to love and criticize his country. We can love with a broken heart. This metaphor means we acknowledge pain, yet continue to love our country and strive to make it a better place.

Reckoning with our past is not learning for learning's sake. Unlearning our whitewashed history is a purposeful project designed to help us be the people we want to be. We can reckon with our past to build a more just future.

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Do you consider yourself a patriot? Why or why not?
2. What is a **gritty patriot**? Why are gritty patriots important?
3. How did you feel when you learned Takei's family story? Why?

### ACTIVITIES

1. Imagine that you and your family were imprisoned because the United States had gone to war with a country from which your ancestors hail. How would you feel?
2. Find out how **gritty** you are by taking the [grit score quiz](#).
3. Make a list of 10 things you dislike about America. For each item on the list, brainstorm one small and specific way in which you could address or mitigate the problem.

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## EPILOGUE: OUR HOUSE

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### SUMMARY

The author shares a poem her child wrote about “the psychic wounds of racism,” specifically about Seneca Village, the black community in Manhattan that was razed to build Central Park.

She acknowledges that conscientious teachers, content creators, authors, activists, historians, and journalists are teaching her children and helping them “unlearn” what she taught them.

She affirms her love of country, even when she critiques her country, even when her country makes her angry. She loves America like she loves her children—unconditionally, not uncritically.

She invites readers to love America with a broken heart and to do the hard work of facing the past in order to build a more just future.

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1.** What are the three most important ideas you took from *A More Just Future*?
- 2.** How do you feel after reading this book?
- 3.** What questions and concerns do you have after reading this book?
- 4.** What specific actions might you take to build a “more just future”?
- 5.** Would you recommend *A More Just Future* to someone else? Why or why not?