Harm-Dependent No More:
Who Are We—Winners and Losers or Relatives?
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Chapter 1: Harms Matter

Asleep to Harms

Win-lose thinking pervades our world, but it has upended our psyches to do so. First, the model tells us it is okay to commit harms routinely if winning calls for it; we talk about winning big, for example, as “making a killing.” But this goes against a deep human desire: we want to be in a good way with each other, and treating each other well and fairly is how we do it.

Second, for a win-lose model to take hold of our minds, certain brain powers—feelings, empathy, and conscience—must be numbed. Win-lose thinking postulates an “Other” and then desensitizes us to their losses. Yet this means we lose a core survival skill: humans are not made to exist alone. Empathy prevents us from harming others precisely so that we can function as collectives, which is what we, being a social species, must do to survive.

Third, because winning—at least in the real world and not on the playing field—entails some loss or harm to others, win-lose thinking covers up harms: it hides, minimizes, justifies, or dismisses them. Winners do not want others to know what they did to win. To cover ugly realities, the winners’ story is that no harm was committed, that what happened was not really a harm, or, if it was, that those who lost have only themselves to blame. The goal is to keep harms off our radar. Harms are, presumably, just how the world works. "Toughen up!" “Just don’t let it happen to you!” Win-lose thinking takes over our minds, and great and obvious harms become as nothing to us. We have minimal if any response to them.

When win-lose thinking rearranges our psyches this way, we lose, because we are less likely to respond to harms with repair and self-change. Our power to self-evolve—a
survival skill for our species—narrows when harms do not matter to us. This book started here.

In 2007, the Minnesota Humanities Center brought together members of the Sesquicentennial Commission, created in 2006 to celebrate 150 years of Minnesota statehood in 2008, with three Dakota scholar-activists. Each of the three—Waziyatawin, Ramona Stately, and Cantemaza—have relatives who were on the 1862 150-mile Death March of 1,700 Dakota women, children, and elders. Some of their relatives survived; others were murdered by soldiers along the way or were killed by White-engineered hunger, disease, and exposure. The commissioners had an opportunity to learn more about how Whites invaded and occupied this land base—how we have used statehood to claim political legitimacy over land that we stole through fraud and genocide.
Minnesota’s founding history is worthy of the most brutal Roman colonizing: not only death marches but also mass executions, concentration camps, ethnic cleansing, punitive military expeditions to kill fleeing Dakotas and to destroy their food supplies, and bounties on Dakota scalps. In 1862, Gov. Alexander Ramsey made "extermination" of the "Sioux Indians of Minnesota" official state policy, announcing it to the state’s legislature.

Many Dakota people feel the traumatic events of 1862 as if they happened yesterday, and for good reason. They live the intended consequences of genocide: massive land loss affecting all generations to follow, cultural destruction, crisis-level poverty, racist discrimination, multigenerational historical trauma, and Native hating on a daily basis. Minnesota’s state policies have continued the legacy that Gov. Ramsey’s campaign of genocide put in place. None of the harms have been repaired. No "public" lands that were stolen have been returned. None of the Dakota people who fled Minnesota’s terrorism in 1862 have been invited to return and provisions made for them to establish self-sustaining lives and communities in Minnesota. Only recently, due to the work of Dakota activists, has this history come to light at all. For 150 years, White historians have made the history disappear from textbooks. Even today, the legislature-supported Minnesota Historical Society refuses to name as genocide the extermination campaign that Minnesota waged in 1862 against the Dakota People.

I attended the 2007 meeting, as did Mark Ritchie, White, then Minnesota’s Secretary of State. Not long into Waziyatawin’s PowerPoint presentation, several of us noticed that Sec. Ritchie was struggling to stay awake. Before long, his head fell back, his mouth fell open, and he began snoring, whereupon he would wake himself up, only to begin his sleep cycle again. When I told this story to Rita Renjitham Alfred of the Restorative Justice Training Institute, she asked immediately, “Why didn’t anyone call him out on that?
Why indeed! Her question showed me how much I have internalized the programming not to challenge White male colonial authority. A whole roomful of people, overwhelmingly White, gave his behavior a pass. His conduct could be dismissed—a busy morning, just after lunch—except that it epitomizes White US Americans’ response to our history of committing mass harms. His sleep is not his alone. We watch Roots and feel terrible, for example, but then carry on with life as usual. Learning about our history of horrific and ongoing harms against Peoples of Color does not spur us to act as a nation to repair the harms and, through the process, to shift to a different track. Land return and reparations, for example, remain unthinkable for many Whites: “Why would we do that?”

Unacknowledged and unrepai r ed, our history of racial violence continues both in society and as a mindset. Pres. Trump’s administration has made the White supremacy embedded in US society starkly obvious, even to Whites. No one argues anymore that the US is a post-racial society. Studies document racial disparities in education, wealth, and home ownership, for example, as well as in personal safety, freedom, income, and health. Centuries of laws, policies, and actions have created and enforced these disparities, but the studies tend not to name White supremacy as the problem or suggest how to address these life-destroying disparities with a World-War-II level of mobilization for systemic
change. Many People of Color live in a chronic state of emergency because of these harms, yet emergency reparative actions are not forthcoming.


In the years since that meeting, Waziyatawin has given up trying to educate Whites. "What is the point?" she asks. I, too, learn about the present-ness of our harm-filled history and wonder: What is wrong with us? How can we do such things, benefit multi-generationally, keep harms going, yet write them out of our minds and sleep-walk away? Where is our empathy, conscience, and commitment to justice?

Like persons, peoples span the spectrum of behavior, from cruel, greedy, and violent to compassionate, fair, and generous. Our social paradigm—our narrative or DNA as a people—directs our energies one way or the other. If we have a criminal record as a people, a paradigm lies at the root.

Mark Ritchie is not a bad person; he is a well-meaning man as far as I know from mutual friends. Yet such a judgment is irrelevant. The issue is neither about bad apples nor about Whites being bad people. We are up against a way of thinking that says only winning matters, and causing harms to others is how we do it. As long as we win, neither harms nor those harmed matter to us. This is a narrative, a paradigm in play.
Win-Lose Thinking Unplugs Our Harm-Alert Sensors

If we are called to collective self-change, then rethinking our relation with harms is the place to start. As we address harms and work together to repair them, the very process of doing this changes us: the narrative shifts, creating mental space for us to self-evolve by thinking differently and practicing different values.

According to the win-lose model, though, repairing harms is the last thing we want to do. We commit harms precisely to give ourselves and our descendants the winner’s advantage. Managing harms so that they are never repaired keeps the hierarchy of who wins and who loses in place. The winning strategy, then, has been to derange our relation with harms, so that we do not repair or rectify them. Win-driven thinking is all about dismissing harms—putting us asleep to them—precisely so that we maintain our position as winners.

This was the chemical industry’s response to White environmentalist Rachel Carson’s book, The Silent Spring. She sounded the alarm about the dangers of DDT and other pesticides—biocides, she termed them—that exploded into mass use after World War II. The same chemicals that kill bugs also kill birds. What if there were no birds left to sing in spring? But, instead of working with her to remedy the problem, the chemical companies waged a media war to discredit her and dismiss her warnings—to silence Rachel Carson.

Rachel Carson’s book, Silent Spring, carried the day, launching a global environmental movement. Though DDT’s use was banned in the US in 1972, the struggle continues against pesticides, now decimating the Earth’s pollinators. More than half a century later, her voice and the activism she inspired endures and will not be silenced.
Rachel Carson served as a harm-alert sensor not for bugs and birds but for humans, since our behavior is what she aimed to change. We all have harm-alert sensors—warnings that go off in us when we sense danger and harm. Every living being has these, and humans do as well. However, as Rachel Carson experienced, our harm-alert sensors get targeted for unplugging when we start naming winners’ harms and exposing their purpose in a win-lose drama.

Moreover, a media war is not the only nor even the most potent way to unplug our harm-alert sensors. Psychological mechanisms disconnect us from our innate alarm systems, empathy being one of the most critical alarm sensors for our species. Empathy tells us when others are experiencing pain, and in a connected system, we know that we or those we love could be next. We have empathy to alert us to dangers, but in a world of winners and losers, our empathy also gets in the way. For example, what if we do not play all-out to win and so end up the next loser? What if winners target us the moment we step out of line by calling for harm’s cessation and repair? A constant win-lose struggle takes a toll on our empathy. To get ahead, we find it easier to live without our feelings intervening. We become empathy-exhausted from the struggle—from bearing witness to so many harms and yet having to block our emotional responses to them. Yet this choice carries a price. The more we deaden ourselves to our inner alerts, the more harms roll on unchecked. We render ourselves less likely to respond to harms at all, much less with mindfulness, resolve, creative action, harm-repair, and through it all, self-change.

Shutting us down to harms psychologically is one way that the win-lose paradigm unplugs our harm-alert sensors. Another way desensitizes us to harms on a philosophical level. The narrative claims that the "real world" operates on a win-lose calculus, that win-lose is the ultimate natural law, therefore that harms are inevitable: "You cannot make an omelet without breaking a few eggs." If harms are a fixed part of our world, then we cannot do much about them; harms are no reason to step back, reflect, and shift course. Just make sure we are not the ones harmed, which means, of course, giving ourselves over to the win-lose struggle.
Harm-Protective Mechanisms: Silence, No Accountability, and Lies

In addition to psychological and philosophical numbing, the win-lose model incorporates other mechanisms—political ones—for keeping harms off our radar, so that they do not spur us to engage collective self-change. Silence, no accountability, and lies form a potent harm-protecting, winner-preserving trio. First, we do not talk about harms—silence surrounds them. Second, we do not hold perpetrators—whether people, police, corporations, or governments—accountable. And third, if someone raises questions, we flood the discourse with lies, partial truths, and dismissals. These harm-protective mechanisms are political in the sense that they shape the public dialogue that in turn shapes our shared governance systems—our policies, funding priorities, and actions as a collective. Repairing harms stays off-limits for the public will.

The tragedy with this trio is at least threefold. First, protecting harms perpetuates harms. Second, those harmed suffer without justice or repair. And third, the trio cuts us off from the feedback we need to learn, grow, and make better choices about which models to iterate. Again, self-change is a survival mechanism for our species. Our brains give us this capacity, and harms, once recognized, spur us to use it, showing us specifically where and how. When we block out harms to others, we lose and so do our descendants. We push off to those who follow the learning and self-transformation that we could have done now. As a result, we hand on to them a world drowning in harms—harms that need not be, had we stepped up.

1. A Code of Silence. The no-talk rule is the first cover. We adhere to a code of silence about harms—the bigger the harm, the bigger the win, hence the bigger the silence. Big silences surround colonization, genocide, slavery, and institutionalized White supremacy and oppression. Evidence has been destroyed or hidden. The numbers of those murdered have been lowered or not recorded at all. Cover stories have been concocted, and master narratives pumped into textbooks, classrooms, and the media. Native Studies professor Amy Lonetree, Ho-Chunk, calls this “willed ignorance,” and it is essential to White supremacy’s “success.” From our earliest years, we learn to keep silent about the
most significant parts of our past: how our forebears got the land we now live on, and how they got labor to profit from the land. The message? These harms are not important now. They do not matter. Of course, that means the people who have suffered their intended consequences—past and present—do not matter either.

A code of silence extends to significant parts of our present as well. We do not talk about how we get oil, clothes, computers, cars, gold, diamonds, or food. We seldom discuss how heavily governments subsidize some industries, such as oil, gas, chemicals, agribusiness, weapons, nuclear energy, or big media corporations, but deny comparable support to other industries, such as renewable green energy, pollution control and cleanup, organic, non-GMO farming, recycling, or public media. Whereas the 2012 presidential debates did not even raise climate change as an issue, the 2016 presidential debates devoted only 5.5 minutes to it. Most of all, silences cloak our government’s workings. Agreeing to stay silent keeps harm-dependent behavior going.

All of us have a role here, yet silence about harms is a tough habit to break. Making our voices heard takes time, creativity, energy, and organizing. On 16 April 1963, Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., wrote in his famous “Letter from Birmingham Jail,” “We will have to repent in this generation not merely for the hateful words and actions of the
bad people but for the appalling silence of the good people.”¹ In his “Beyond Vietnam” speech on 4 April 1967, he said, “A time comes when silence is betrayal.”²

Breaking silences also takes courage, since the price for talking can be high. Those who call out harms lose positions and careers and may face prison or death. At White President Dwight D. Eisenhower’s directive, the US ousted Iran’s Prime Minister Dr. Mohammad Mosaddegh in a 1953 coup. Prime Minister Mosaddegh was a democratically elected, nationalist leader committed to decolonizing his country. He is regarded as “the leading champion of secular democracy and resistance to foreign domination in Iran’s modern history.”³ His offense, as far as the British and Pres. Eisenhower were concerned, was nationalizing Iran’s oil, so that the people of Iran could benefit from one of their country’s richest resources. In classic extractive colonizer behavior, the British oil company was taking all the profits out of Iran, leaving Iran a very poor country. Prime Minister Mosaddegh could have saved his political career by not opposing the oil company that became British Petroleum (BP). Instead, he said, “If I sit silently, I have sinned.”
Iran’s Prime Minister Mohammad Mosaddegh was removed from office by a 1953 coup orchestrated by the British MI6 and the US CIA. He was sentenced to three years of solitary confinement in a military prison and afterward held under house arrest until his passing (1882–1967). Public domain.

2. No Accountability for Harms. Not holding perpetrators accountable gives harms a pass. It says that harms do not matter and that the body politic will look the other way. Maintaining silences about how we came here guarantees no accountability. In turn, no accountability guarantees that the future will replicate the past. The message? Harm-dependence works, and the lives of People and Nations of Color do not matter; they are expendable.

Black Lives Matter activists march to hold states, counties, and cities accountable for police killings of Black people for at least three reasons: to gain justice for grieving families; to stop police killings from happening again; and to change the narrative. Holding harm-doers accountable is how people, systems, and narratives change. Archbishop Desmond Tutu, South African and chairman of the 1995 South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, told the Greensboro Truth and Reconciliation Commission, convened in 2004 to address the 3 November 1979 KKK killing of five protesters: “You are a crippled community, and you are going to be a crippled community as long as you refuse to face up to your past.”
The Greensboro Truth and Reconciliation Commission was organized independently of governments to investigate the 3 November 1979 KKK and American Nazi Party shooting of communist and anti-Klan protestors, killing five and wounding eleven. In this photo, the five Commissioners were sworn in before an audience of more than 500 people at the Depot in Greensboro, 12 June 2004. Photo by Lewis A. Brandon, III. Courtesy of the Beloved Community Center, Greensboro, North Carolina.

Protecting win-driven, predatory behavior with no accountability for harms committed rewards the behavior. Waziyatawin characterizes Gov. Ramsey as “the architect of genocide,” yet like Sec. Ritchie, he, too, is not called out but continues to be treated like a hero in Minnesota. His mansion is a downtown St. Paul tourist site. Places, schools, playgrounds, and a county are named after him. Again, the message? Ramsey’s actions were good, right, and justified—worthy of being celebrated. Land theft by genocide makes a politician a hero. By going along with this narrative, we tell future generations that committing mass harms—crimes against humanity—to win for “us” is acceptable behavior.
Only when winners lose their power-advantage does the truth come out and calls for repair and change gain traction. “The world held us personally responsible for the crimes of the Third Reich. It serves us right. Nobody can escape this collective guilt,” one German woman said after World War II. When the Allies defeated Germany, the German people were called to account for what the Nazis had done in their name.\textsuperscript{5} If Germany had won the war, most likely the Germans would not have held themselves accountable either. The Holocaust in Europe would have stayed a whispered, discredited secret—a “conspiracy theory.”

After they lost the war, though, the German people could not escape accountability, so they committed themselves to remembering the Holocaust with memorials everywhere. Future generations would know every step of what happened and be better equipped not to repeat their past. David Andreae, dual citizen of the U.K. and the Netherlands and a decades-long friend, commented in 2017 that, of all the European nations he has observed, Germany today seems most able to articulate their values and then act on them. From being despised for their atrocities, Germans have self-changed into a people that others can learn from, and holding themselves accountable for genocide is how they did it.

\textbf{3. Lies and Spin.} Lies weave a fantasy narrative around the horrific yet institutionalized hence normalized realities of a win-lose world. Convoluted spin and half-truths target our powers of reason: What is true? Who can we believe? Which stories are legitimate? Which facts represent reality accurately? Internet and television silos compete for our trust.

Constructing “facts” that serve a winner’s advantage or labeling authentic news as fake when it endangers a win—“fake news” dramas that make false news seem true and true news seem false—did not start with Pres. Trump. His administration is a product, not a cause, of these practices. For decades, governments and corporations have normalized spin, and information gatekeepers have woven veils of lies and half-truths to
blur realities and to discredit truth-tellers. Consider Exxon’s documented campaign to seed doubt and denial about climate-chaos from the human use of fossil fuels since the late 1970s. Or consider the US intelligence community’s longstanding claim that the US government had not been illegally spying on its citizens, until White whistleblower Edward Snowden released evidence that proved otherwise. None of these behaviors are new. The Atlantic reports that people complained of an “epidemic of fake news” in 1896, and storytellers and playwrights have warned of those who lie and the tragic consequences of believing them since time immemorial.

Here as well, lying about harms takes two: those who tell the lies and those who believe them. Lies about our society require a majority of us to accept them as truth. We agree to bracket our critical faculties. Across White institutions and communities, we collude in maintaining lies about our history. White historians and White-run historical societies across the country adhere to the White code of silence and lies: they tell history selectively, piecing together a narrative made of partial truths that whitewashes the deeds of our past and present as well. Instead of reporting the mass harms that founded the US, for example, White keepers of knowledge have promoted a fantasy of White innocence in how we fixed ourselves on this continent. The US as a site of systematic, state-sanctioned violence and terrorism against Peoples of Color and poor Whites as well is not the image of our country that most of us Whites have.

In his books *Lies My Teacher Told Me* and *Lies Across America*, White author and sociologist James Loewen documents the on-the-ground cover-up of the brutal, violent side of our history. Tours of some southern plantations, for example, do not mention slavery. They do not take visitors to the slaves’ huts or show them where slaves had to eat a foul slurry in troughs that they had to share with dogs and consume without dishes or utensils. The tours take visitors instead to elegant dining rooms where tables are laid with imported lace tablecloths and place settings. Visitors see the opulence Whites enjoyed but not the savagery by which Whites gained such wealth.
A Formula for Harms Without End

The innocence of the White population is, as Loewen contends, one of the big lies that keep harms going. Whites are raised to believe that we are not complicit in win-driven harms. Though the very first thing we do every morning when we get out of bed is, as Dr. Frances Kay Holmes, Muscogee descent and Indigenous Studies professor, observes, to put our feet on stolen land, we do not feel personally connected to the First Harm of land theft through genocide against Indigenous Peoples. Nor do we see ourselves as complicit in the enslavement of Indigenous Africans. Whites as a people possess enormous wealth
advantages over Peoples of Color and enjoy a privileged standing in social, economic, and political hierarchies. We also accept global wage slavery, including prison labor, so we can buy cheap consumer goods. If we had repaired the Second Harm, we would have learned to respect human labor enough to care about those doing the work and the conditions in which they do it. Our collective awareness of racial disparities and harms is increasing, and yet race-based patterns of harm remain a norm, precisely because mass harms have stood unaddressed, unrepaired, and unrectified.

Absent this process, we are slow to change. Steps forward, such as twice electing an African American to be the US president, are hounded by backlash and regression. Pres. Trump is no fluke; he is the harvest of an out-of-balance present, created by an unrepaired past. A society constructed on centuries of racial violence has burned into Whites a viscerally negative response to People of Color rising in power, wealth, and authority. White supremacy makes wins easy for us precisely by keeping Others down. It gives Whites a presumed license to harm Others as the way to win and keep winning, and Trump is all about both White supremacy and winning. Disenfranchising millions of voters of color is, for example, a no-brainer for a White supremacist strategy for winning elections.

But this is rule by injustice, violence, and doing harm. We may cover over White supremacy’s violence for a time, but it comes roaring out when Whites feel threatened, as many do today. By 2043, People of Color will make up the majority of the US population. For many Whites, that is scary. Not only is our winner status less secure, but also we fear that Peoples of Color might do to us what we have done to them. We could become the new predestined losers.

This is what win-lose thinking does to our minds. Iterating a formula that depends on doing harm makes us afraid of each other and leads to harms without end. The harms I cite in the next few pages—and throughout the book, for that matter—are but a few of the numberless harms that have been committed, ignored, and allowed to pass without accountability, wrapped in lies and cover-ups. This is our house on fire.
Naming the fire and what causes it is not negative but positive. It is the only way we can put out the fire and eliminate its causes, in the process committing ourselves to self-change.

_Harms without end: violence against Black families and communities._ As we all now know, the Civil War (1861–1865) did not end White racial oppression, terrorism, and violence against African Americans. World War I (1914–1918) proved transformative for African Americans and lifted them up for the fight for justice. Having risked their lives “fighting for democracy,” as White Pres. Woodrow Wilson framed the war, Black soldiers saw no reason to accept racial oppression on their return home. But the US economy was in a depression/recession, and Whites resented any Black prosperity and competition for jobs. In the summer of 1919 and into the early 1920s, Whites instigated race riots that raged in Washington, D.C., Tennessee, Texas, Arkansas, Nebraska, Oklahoma, Florida, and Illinois, to name a few states. Rioting Whites murdered hundreds, if not thousands, of Black citizens and destroyed their homes, businesses, towns, and communities—all their wealth.

Only since the 1980s has the public discussed Whites’ 1923 massacre of Blacks in Rosewood, Florida, for instance, or Whites’ 1921 burning of the prosperous Black community in Tulsa, Oklahoma. Similar massacres and burnings of Black communities occurred across the country. No White person was ever charged with a crime in these cases, neither did the White communities help their Black neighboring communities rebuild and recover their losses. How many African US Americans were killed depends on whose accounts we believe.
Across the US, White mobs terrorized Black families who dared to move into White neighborhoods. They deprived families of color the chance to invest in homes where property values were likely to go up, thereby preventing them from building wealth across generations. During the Great Migration, which occurred between 1916 and 1970, six million African-Americans moved from the rural Southern US to the urban Northeast, Midwest, and West. Black families fled Whites’ terrorism and violence in the South, but when they came to the North, ethnic White communities, notably the Irish, wanted no Black families settling in their territories. In Chicago, a White-instigated race riot raged from 27 July to 3 August 1919. White gangs combed neighborhoods looking for African Americans to murder.
Though the human and economic losses for communities of color are incalculable, again, White-run institutions have ensured that Whites are not held accountable. The result? Race-driven harms remain a formula for Whites to maintain racial advantages that we have iterated across generations, down to the recent home mortgage scandals that targeted homeowners of color.

**Harms without end: the ever-present threat of lethal violence.** Lynchings are another well-documented example of how silence, no accountability, and lies have created a license for Whites to harm People of Color with impunity across generations.
According to the Census Bureau, Whites lynched an estimated 4,742 African US Americans between 1882 and 1968. The actual number is surely higher, since untold numbers of lynchings were never recorded. In the US West, Natives, Mexicans, and Asians were also lynched. Collector James Allen, White, has gathered photographs and postcards of lynchings in his book, *Without Sanctuary*. In a 3 September 2000 New York Times review of the book, editor Scott Veale, also White, wrote:

[W]hat is most shocking is the crowds of perpetrators and witnesses—many of them children—posing casually without masks or shame, even smiling, next to the victims. … The photographs were taken between 1883 and 1960, and nearly all originally appeared on postcards, some with handwritten messages like, “’This is the barbecue we had last night,’” which was scrawled on the back of a card showing a burned torso dangling from a pole. … “The photographs stretch our credulity, even numb our minds and senses to the full extent of the horror,” [White historian Leon F.] Litwack writes, “but they must be examined if we are to understand how normal men and women could live with, participate in and defend such atrocities, even reinterpret them so they would not see themselves or be perceived as less than civilized.”
Scholar and activist Dr. Raymond A. Winbush, African-US-American, argues that the lynchings were not crimes of racial hatred and contempt alone. Stealing land was more often the motive. In *Should America Pay? Slavery and the Raging Debate on Reparations*, Prof. Winbush writes:

It is a commonly held myth that the majority of Black men were lynched during the Jim Crow era because of spurious accusations of some impropriety toward whites, particularly white women. Tulsa and Rosewood reinforce this idea, but land theft was a frequent motivation in lynching Black families. It was a quick and easy way to illegally deprive Blacks of their land. It was not unusual for the grieving widow of the victim to abandon the land within a few days after the murder of her husband or other male relative. The abandoned property would then be placed in auction because it had been deserted and new deeds would be drawn and agreements struck with the new owners that nullified existing title papers of the murdered owner....
Lynching because of imagined crimes against white women was far more acceptable psychologically as a rationale for murder than admitting guilt over land theft. 

Whites say to ourselves, “But we don’t do that anymore!” Actually, the impulse to lynch our fellow Black citizens is very much alive. Nooses have been found hanging in schools across the country, not only in high schools but also in middle and elementary schools, as well as in fraternity houses on college campuses. Nooses have also been found in workplaces at the desks of African Americans. Whites use the threat of violence to assert White supremacy and “keep Blacks in their place.”

When harms stand unrepaired and harm-doers are not held accountable, harms repeat like clockwork. To date, no land has been returned to Black families whose male head of household was lynched several generations ago. Family wealth would have multiplied many times over in the time since. With lynchings and their spoils unrectified, a presumed license to kill African US Americans with impunity continues. The list is long
of unarmed Black men, women, and children who have been murdered, mostly by police, while they were going about their lives. The license for Whites to murder Blacks with impunity reinforces the racial hierarchy—White supremacy.

**Harms without end: Native lives expendable.** Nor are harms without end limited to African Americans. US society renders all Peoples of Color vulnerable to attacks from Whites at all times. People of Color report that no area of life—school, workplace, banking, loans, car purchases, home ownership, renting, shopping, even a drive across town—is safe from racist targeting and discriminatory, violent treatment. The simplest errand can end in incarceration or murder for no reason but being a Person of Color, especially when police are involved. As a result, their daily stress levels are high, which takes a toll on their health and family relations.

Consider this most basic issue of physical safety and right to life. Native people are regularly racially profiled, brutalized, raped, and killed as well, but we seldom hear their stories. If a profiling, beating, rape, or murder of an Indigenous person makes the news, it becomes a factoid, not a movement for justice or a call to hold police or attackers accountable. The American Indian Movement (AIM) was founded in Minneapolis in 1968 precisely to stop police harassment and brutality against Native people, but the Native-hating violence continues. Virginia Bad Moccasin, Hunkpati Dakota and a grandmother, has been collecting South Dakota and Minnesota newspaper articles reporting these crimes against Native people for years. “I have a box of clippings now. No one cares,” she says, “It’s okay to kill Indians.” Had White people suffered comparable violence, our communities would be up in arms, the stories would be all over the news, and our governments would be galvanized into emergency actions.
Harms without end: killing brown children globally. The US’ dependence on committing harms without end has operated globally as well. A presumed license for the White-run US to harm Black and Brown people has infused US foreign policy: overthrowing governments; destroying economies; waging war; torturing and killing citizens; and rendering homelands uninhabitable from chemical warfare (e.g., Agent Orange), munitions, and industries (oil fields). In 2003, for example, Pres. G. W. Bush contrived war against Afghanistan and Iraq, both countries of color, and developed an international torture network targeting mostly Brown Muslim men. The pretext of weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) was fabricated, a lie. Some US soldiers tapped into the win-lose racism driving the war and its torture program and committed war crimes: massacring civilians, terrorizing communities, raping women, and disappearing male family members and torturing them. They carried out the policy that Brown lives globally matter no more than Native, Black, and Brown lives do here in the US.

A harm-alert sensor went off years before the 2003 Iraq war to tell us how genocidal this thinking is. The US had led a UN Security Council policy of sanctions
against Iraq from 1990–2003 under Presidents H. W. Bush (R), Bill Clinton (D), and G. W. Bush (R). The sanctions caused a humanitarian crisis in Iraq, including starvation and inadequate medical and sanitation supplies. In a 1996 segment of 60 Minutes, journalist Lesley Stahl, White, questioned Madeleine Albright, also White, and former US Secretary of State and former US Ambassador to the UN during part of that time, about the deaths of Iraqi children:

**Lesley Stahl on US sanctions against Iraq:** We have heard that a half million children have died. I mean, that’s more children than died in Hiroshima. And, you know, is the price worth it?

**Secretary of State Madeleine Albright:** I think this is a very hard choice, but the price—we think the price is worth it.¹²

The near total financial and trade embargo against Iraq continued seven years after this interview until May 2003, and both Republican and Democratic presidents carried out this policy. How many more Iraqi children did the sanctions kill? The Iraqis experienced the US-led policy as a campaign of genocide against their children.

As a people, White US Americans have yet to decide that genocide is not an acceptable way to get what we want. If we want to self-change here, repairing our First Harm is the way to do it and make it stick. Otherwise, our First Harm stands as a green light to commit genocide if the win is big enough to warrant it—if “we think the price is worth it.”

**Getting Off the Harm-Dependent Track**

Harms happen. Humans can do horrible things, and we are all human. What happens next is key: What is our response when harms occur? Restorative justice says that how we respond to harms makes all the difference. It shapes what kind of relationships, families, and communities we have; it shapes our character, both personally and as peoples; it shapes our societies going forward, which means it shapes our future. In the biggest
frame, our responses to harms shape our evolution—how and in what directions we evolve as peoples and as a species.

If denial, no accountability, and lies form our collective response to the biggest harms in our history, then the pattern of harm-dependence will continue. To win and win big, we will not shrink from committing harms not only against Peoples of Color but also against other nations and against the natural world. Win-lose thinking will stay enthroned as the way to “success,” and growing into being relatives will take longer. Dominican-US-American writer and creative writing professor Junot Díaz observed, “You can’t grow if you admit no mistakes.”

Dismissing harms and silencing those who sound the alarm, especially whistleblowers and journalists, is not a pro-survival, pro-evolution, pro-health, or even pro-success response. Feeling pain when we step on broken glass, put our hand on a hot stove, or get sick is good: pain alerts us to danger and a need for action. Only then can we respond, so that we are not harmed further. If harms are in our midst, then falling asleep to them only increases the danger. A harm-producing system is at work, pumping harms into a world we share.

Harms give us feedback: they sound the alarm. Positive feedback—things are fine—is not nearly as important to heed as negative feedback. Whereas positive feedback
tells us to keep doing what we are doing, negative feedback tells us to wake up, find out what is going on, repair damage, and self-change.

**Truth-Telling**

Assuming that growth in consciousness and soul is always a good idea and that addressing harms catalyzes this process, where do we begin? In restorative justice, the process begins with finding out what happened and sharing the stories. We can stop the silence with truth-telling.

During the 2004 and 2006 Dakota Commemorative Marches, I listened to the truth-telling of Dakota people, as they shared stories of what happened to their ancestors, families, and relatives during the 1862 US–Dakota War and since. It was life-changing for me, and I am obviously still processing how to respond. This photo of the 2006 March was taken by Reuben Wambdi Kitto, Jr., who wrote this description:

The biannual Dakota Commemorative March retraces the 150-mile forced march imposed on 1,700 Dakota people in 1862. The photographer, Reuben Wambdi Kitto, Jr., marches with his family every time in memory of his ancestor Pazahiyayewin, who endured the march at age twenty-six with her four children and elderly mother, at the same time that her husband was sentenced by a military tribunal to death by hanging. Mr. Kitto describes the photo: “On the morning of the final day of the march (November 13, 2006), the Creator provided bright sunshine that was somewhat uplifting to the weary marchers, however only steps from the end of their journey they walked into the shadow of the Mendota Bridge, which brought a sudden and somber reminder of the dark days that our ancestors endured in the concentration camp that winter in 1862.”
Truth-telling is powerful. It energizes and expands our evolution. Truth-telling gives us feedback from reality, which we need to evolve. Win-lose systems would not suppress truth-telling with such vigor if it were not such a game-changer.

Bryan Stevenson, African-US-American attorney and author, explains the internally toxic and outwardly lethal legacies of our collective choice not to talk about racism—how it operates in the US and how it impacts both People of Color and Whites:

We haven’t created an environment where people of color can be fully protected, because we haven’t talked about what it means to be a person of color in this country. ... [W]e’ve never really told the truth about some basic realities....

I don’t think we’ve ever told the truth about what slavery did to our thinking about racial difference. We told lies about people of color. We said that people of African descent aren’t smart, aren’t hard-working, aren’t capable, and because of that, we should enslave them. And because we never confronted that, slavery didn’t end, it just evolved. It turned into decades of racial terror, where we use violence and lynching and convict leasing and threats to sustain racial hierarchy. That’s our history up until the era of Jim Crow and segregation. And then we codified these differences between the races.
And even after the civil rights movement, we never told the truth about all of the damage we did. We humiliated people of color on a daily basis for decades. My parents were humiliated every day of their life. I started my education in a colored school, because I was told I wasn’t smart enough to go to the public school. Those things accumulate. And because we haven’t dealt with it, we now live in an era of mass incarceration, where we intimidate and threaten and harass and menace people of color. And ... everybody feels it....

And you can’t recover—and white people, too. We have a whole generation of white people who were taught that they’re better than other people because of their race. And we haven’t helped them recover from that, and they’re manifesting this bias in ways that they’re not even conscious of sometimes. We’ve got a lot of work to do in this country to confront our history of racial inequality....

And so, we shouldn’t be surprised if you don’t get justice [in Ferguson]. What we should do is start talking about truth. And we’ve got to commit ourselves to a process of truth and reconciliation.\textsuperscript{14}
Truth-Telling Outlawed and In Struggle

Slowly, many peoples and marginalized groups are telling their stories, generating both written and living libraries of cultural knowledge and histories. Yet those whose stories do not support the narrative of White supremacy—the “master narrative”—face opposition. The discipline of ethnic studies, for example, is under attack. In high schools and colleges, ethnic studies courses tell the harm-dependent patterns in US history. They name how these patterns have hurt Peoples of Color for centuries and still do. In response, White-dominated administrations and governments are cutting or eliminating ethnic studies departments and programs.

In Arizona, for example, an administrative law judge ruled in December 2011 “that a Tucson school district’s ethnic studies program violates state law, agreeing with the findings of Arizona’s public schools chief. … The judge said such teaching promotes activism against white people, promotes racial resentment and advocates ethnic solidarity.” In other words, no matter what harms Whites commit against Peoples of Color, these actions are off limits for academic discourse. Teaching students what Whites have done to Peoples of Color violates Arizona state law.
Curtis Acosta began the Mexican American Studies (MAS) program in Tucson, Arizona, in 1998. The program grew to forty-three classes serving 1,500 students in six high schools. The dropout rate for MAS students went down to 2.5 percent, as opposed to 56 percent for Latino students nationally. He proved that his Chicano students came alive intellectually, emotionally, and personally when they could learn about their history and culture, including truths that White narratives hide or lie about. "A study by Tucson United School District (TUSD) found that 98 percent of MAS students reported they did homework, and 66 percent went on to college. The program was widely regarded as helping Latino youth feel empowered and achieve their full academic and human potential." Shutting down such a successful program for students was a clear case of Whites asserting White supremacy in education, which means suppressing other voices and silencing unwelcome truths. White law forced Latino students to learn White history only and outlawed learning their own.

This story has a hard-won happy ending. In July 2013, after a two-year legal struggle, a federal court ordered Tucson United School District (TUSD) to reinstate high school Mexican American Studies and to add African American Studies. The courses are now described as "culturally relevant" classes.
As in this case, truth-telling about harms involves struggle. Again, winner-controlled institutions would not fight so hard to suppress truth-telling if it were not so powerful in catalyzing self-change.

**What Kind of People Do We Want to Be?**

Behind this whole discussion—winners, losers, and harms—lies a core issue: Who are we? Who do we want to be as a people? How we respond to harms obviously matters for those harmed, but, as Bryan Stevenson said, it also matters for those who commit harms and benefit from them. Our response to harms reflects who we are and shapes who we become.

Indigenous people have observed Whites over centuries. Because they do not whitewash or hide our deeds, they know White character more fully than we are willing to know ourselves. In *The Unjust Society*, the great leader, teacher, negotiator, and lawyer Dr. Harold Cardinal, Sucker Creek Cree First Nation, wrote that his forefathers were simply not prepared to deal with a people who had no qualms about lying in order to get what they want—to commit fraud and theft—fully aware of how disastrous the consequences would be for Indigenous Peoples:

Our forefathers got taken by slick-talking, fork-tongued cheats. It wasn’t their fault. Our forefathers, with possibly a few cynical exceptions, never understood the white man. They had fought battles, known victory and defeat, but treachery was new to them. They were accustomed to trusting another man’s word, even an enemy’s.

The Indian leaders who signed our treaties with the representatives of the government of Canada came to the signatory negotiations and meetings with honorable intent and laudable purpose. Their gravest mistake was to give the white man the benefit of the doubt and to attribute to him the same high principles. He didn’t have them.
The mindset and behavior of Whites that Cardinal critiques pervade our history as well as our current relations with Peoples and Nations of Color—patterns that prove lethal for those we target. Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz recounts how, in March 1782, White militiamen under the command of White settler David Williamson rounded up ninety-six Delaware family members—forty-two men, twenty women, and thirty-four children—confiscated anything that could be used as a weapon, put them in two houses overnight, and methodically slaughtered them. One militiaman’s arm became exhausted from bludgeoning the Delaware men, women, and children to death with a cooper’s mallet, so he passed it to an accomplice: "My arm fails me. Go on with the work."

Moravian missionaries had converted this particular group of Delawares to Christianity, but this did not save them. The pretext for their mass murder was that they had given refuge to Delawares who had killed White people. A year earlier, the Delaware
leader Buckongeahelas had warned a group of Christianized Delawares about Whites, again, based on his observations of our character as a people:

They do what they please. They enslave those who are not of their color, although created by the same Great Spirit who created us. They would make slaves of us if they could, but as they cannot do it, they kill us. There is no faith to be placed in their words. They are not like the Indians, who are only enemies while at war, and are friends in peace. They will say to an Indian: "My friend, my brother." They will take him by the hand, and at the same time destroy him. And so you will also be treated by them before long. Remember that this day I have warned you to beware of such friends as these. I know the long knives; they are not to be trusted.19

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19 Buckongeahelas, Delaware leader (c. 1720–1805). This sculpture, "Buckongeahelas and His Son Mahonegon" by the late Ross Straight, depicts Buckongeahelas holding his son, Mahonegon, who was killed in 1773 by White Captain William White. Buckongeahelas led his band of Delawares west for safety and became a highly respected leader in the wars to repel White settlers in his region. The sculpture is located at Jawbone Park in Buckhannon, West Virginia. Photo courtesy of Amanda Hayes/The Record Delta.
If the reflection we see through Indigenous eyes is not who we want to be, then we can collectively self-change, as the Germans did. Self-change is a process, and repairing harms that we as a collective have perpetrated and continue to benefit from is the place to begin. Why? Because it goes to our origins, to the core of who we are as a people. Repairing harms involves truth-telling—breaking silences and exposing lies—thereby being honest about how we got here and who we have become along the way. We listen to those harmed as well as to those who committed and have gained from harms. Along with truth-telling, repairing harms involves accountability: working together to meet the needs that harms have created and to meet our obligations to put things right. As we engage the reparative process, we learn how to practice our better values, and slowly, as we take reparative actions, we self-change.

**The Struggle: “To Be Who You Are”**

In the struggle of self-change, being who we are is key. We come back to Helen Prejean’s insight, “We are all more than the worst thing we have ever done.” Through the journey to repair harms, both sides find themselves expressing more of who they are and can be. Our challenge is to bring the best in us to repairing the harms that we have committed at our worst.

Author, scholar, and educator Dr. Edward C. Valandra, Sicangu Titunwan, named what he understands decolonizing to be all about for Indigenous Peoples: “Decolonizing means being who you are.” Dr. Henrietta Mann, Cheyenne, tribal college president and professor, said much the same in a keynote address in 2009.20
Colonization—win-lose thinking writ large—denies the cultures, languages, traditions, histories, families, communities, sovereignty, land bases, and every other facet that make Indigenous Peoples who they are. So when Indigenous people act, live, and be who they are, defending their homelands and relatives, they are decolonizing—throwing off colonization. Being who they are is liberating, because it shatters the roles that colonization has imposed.

Does "being who you are" decolonize winners/colonizers as well? Of course it does. The winner/colonizer role no more captures a human being than the loser/colonized role does. When we impose a role on others, we simultaneously impose one on ourselves.

What then does “being who we are” mean for those of us who are White? Our ancestors belonged to many different peoples in Europe. Only when they came here did they and now we become “White.” Bringing with us a win-lose mindset, immigrants from Europe stepped into the White supremacist role because it served us to do so. For generations, we have identified who we are as a people with the role of racially superior dominators, and the role has framed who we have become ever since.

But however much the role brings material advantages, it fails to instill values that nurture and protect life. Identifying ourselves as racially superior to others and as having a right to keep them down by excluding and harming them cannot impart meaning the way Indigenous ways and cultures sustain life and meaning for their peoples. The emphasis in many Indigenous cultures is on responsibilities that sustain the lives of families, communities, peoples, and the natural world. Meaning comes from fulfilling responsibilities to each other and to all that makes life possible. Practicing responsibilities engages us with life. The role of White supremacy does not do this. It comes between us and life, mediating the relation with win-lose, harm-dependent thinking.

Constructed to serve winning by forcing others to lose, the role of White has made us into a people who behave as Harold Cardinal, Buckongeahelas, and countless other People of Color have experienced us to be. No wonder we are fragile about our racial identity—“White fragility.” When our experiences with People of Color call out our
Whiteness, we know that what we identify with to maintain our place in society comes at the expense of Others. Justice tells us the role is indefensible, and yet beneath the role, who are we?

Trump’s presidency has confronted us with these core issues of White identity. What does an obsession with winning do to us? Where does it take us? “Whites as the winners” is who we have been on this continent from the start. Trump appealed to Whites as winners in his 2016 campaign. In Billings, Montana, for example, he referred to winning—and clearly for Whites—as “making America great again”:

“We’re going to win so much, you’re going to be so sick and tired of winning, you’re going to come to me and go ‘Please, please, we can’t win anymore.’ You’ve heard this one. You’ll say ‘Please, Mr. President, we beg you sir, we don’t want to win anymore. It’s too much. It’s not fair to everybody else.’” Trump said. “And I’m going to say ‘I’m sorry, but we’re going to keep winning, winning, winning. We’re going to make America great again.”

Does Trump’s vision represent who we want to be? He did not invent this racial self-image. Whites as winners, no matter what the cost, has been our self-concept since Columbus landed. Trump does us a great service by laying out the narrative of White supremacy so plainly for all of us to see. If this is not who we want to be as a people, how do we self-change?

Owning our relation to the role opens spaces for us to evolve beyond it, because we realize the role is not us. There is more to us, but we face a journey to find this more. Self-change for a people does not come without effort. Instead of denying or defending how the win-driven role has warped our relation with others, we can own what we have been part of and then work to address the harms our people have caused. By putting things right—rebalancing forced imbalances—we undo not only the deeds but also the hierarchy of White supremacy. Further, with each harm repaired, we dismantle within ourselves how this role has commandeered our minds, emotions, and energies. We name
the role, acknowledge its price to Others, own our part in keeping it going, repair the harms, and, by so doing, act in ways that effect self-change. Acting contrary to the role that our White supremacist society has given us, we begin to engage our responsibilities to be good relatives.

Many Indigenous philosophies as well as scientists view humans as a young species, and Western societies as the youngest. As with all youth, our challenge is to avoid destroying ourselves and those around us before we grow up. Lilian Thuram, Guadeloupe-born World Cup football (soccer) player and sports hero for the French, runs a foundation in France that works against racism and colonialism. He observes,

> When a society can confront its history, then it starts to grow up. That is why, to me, it would be important that people know how America was built on a genocide. I say this, even though I am not Indian. But I imagine it would be beneficial for all, and humanity would grow, with an egalitarian vision. Because we have been misled by political speeches, speeches that made us believe in a hierarchy that is just made up in order to exploit the native populations.\(^{22}\)

Lilian Thuram, Guadeloupe-born former World Cup football champion, now working against racism and colonialism. Photo by Lefalher, 18 March 2012. Licensed under CC BY-SA 3.0.
Harms matter. Responding to them with repair changes us: it enables us to grow into the kind of people we most want to be. Growth in consciousness and character is not rocket science, nor does it require technology. Acknowledging how related we are, owning our histories and our roles in them, working together to repair harms, and striving to be good relatives: these practices are doable and transformative. They have to do with being human—more human than winner/loser roles allow.
Notes

2. King, Jr., “Beyond Vietnam.”
5. Rittenmeyer and Skundrick, directors, Third Reich. This documentary film and DVD presents images of Germany in the 20s, 30s, and 40s through the home movies filmed by German citizens.
8 History.com and Wikipedia.com have online content under “The Chicago Race Riot of 1919.”
16. Fong, "When This Teacher’s Ethnic Studies Classes Were Banned, His Students Took the District to Court—and Won."
17. According to Native scholar Dr. Edward C. Valandra, Sicangu Titunwan, “Harold Cardinal (Unjust Society, 1969) is to Aboriginal Peoples in Canada as Vine Deloria, Jr. (Custer Died for your Sins, 1969) is to Native Peoples in the US” (Email correspondence, 21 December 2012.) Both men became monumental intellectual and critical forces who shifted consciousness for Native and Aboriginal Peoples, as well as for many Whites. Indeed, The Unjust Society is credited with causing Canada’s government to abandon its termination/assimilationist policies during the 1970s.

20. Dr. Mann made this statement in a keynote address at the 18–21 November 2009 *Native Peoples Native Homelands Climate Change Workshop II* held in Prior Lake, Minnesota.

21. Lutey, “Trump: ‘We’re Going to Win So Much, You’re Going to Be So Sick and Tired of Winning.’”