

Slouching Toward Awareness: Deeper Discovery

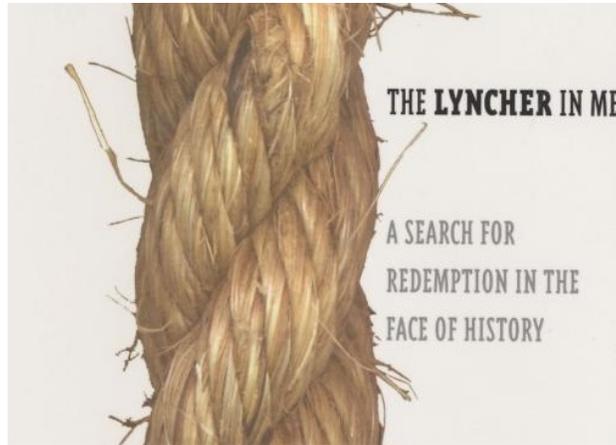
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Bainbridge Island & N. Kitsap County, WA
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READING INTRO:

I draw from a very notable book, called “The Lyncher in Me” by Cedars member Warren Read, who did formidable, soul-searching research in his family history to uncover how his great-grandfather had helped incite a deadly 1920 riot in Duluth, MN, that falsely accused three visiting African American circus workers of raping a local woman. The mob then violently lynched all three.



Warren investigated this incident thoroughly, and eloquently describes the effect this journey had on him, including ways he endeavored to take responsibility for his relative’s involvement. It is a compelling and insightful portrayal of powerful personal growth through deeper, if painful discovery.

The last portion of the book tells of Warren’s profound visit to meet the Missouri descendants of one of the murdered men. And he ends the book with these two paragraphs...

READING From *The Lyncher in Me* by Warren Read

http://warren-read.com/the_lyncher_in_me

When I arrived home the next day, Shayne was eager to hear about my trip. He listened intently, but at the first break in the story, he interrupted. “By the way, the morning glory is coming up in your garden again,” he warned. “You need to get it before it goes to seed.” During the garden rehab, we’d brought in a truckload of dirt from one of Shayne’s clients, another garden that was receiving a makeover. Most of the dirt would go into the borders of my garden; the rest was used as fill for a new bed he was installing off of our front porch. “Something happened with the dirt,” he’d said. We discovered too late that along with the soil came seeds of morning glory, a viciously invasive vine just waiting for the optimum conditions to sprout and take over.

I put away my luggage, rifled through the mail, and made my way to the garden. Kneeling down next to the roses, I carefully snapped the vines that had entwined themselves around the thorny stems, loosening the chokehold they had on the bush. Scraping deep down into the soil, I gripped the weeds at the roots and yanked them out. Something did happen. Like it or not, just like the morning glory in my garden, the lyncher in me exists, no longer buried, no longer entwining itself around things of beauty reaching for sunlight, but always trying. I can seek to control it; I can work to keep it from spreading, but it will likely be there forever. Because in my garden, as in my life, something always happens. That, I cannot deny.

From digging in the earth, literally and metaphorically, to the earth's call that this popular hymn invites:

HYMN #298 *Wake, Now, My Senses* (Thomas J. S. Mikelson)

1. ***Wake, now, my senses***, and hear the earth call; Feel the deep power of being in all;
Keep, with the web of creation your vow, Giving, receiving as love shows us how.
2. ***Wake, now my reason***, reach out to the new; Join with each pilgrim who quests for the true
Honor the beauty and wisdom of time; Suffer thy limit, and praise the sublime.
3. ***Wake, now, compassion***, give heed to the cry; Voices of suffering fill the wide sky;
Take as your neighbor both stranger and friend, Praying and striving their hardship to end.
4. ***Wake, now, my conscience***, with justice thy guide Join with all people whose rights are denied;
Take not for granted a privileged place; God's love embraces the whole human race.
5. ***Wake, now, my vision*** of ministry clear; Brighten my pathway with radiance here;
Mingle my calling with all who will share; Work toward a planet transformed by our care.

Sermon: <i>Slouching Toward Awareness: Deeper Discovery</i> Rev. Jaco B. ten Hove
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Comin' on winter, it is—often an introspective time, when we earthlings reflect the planet's call to hunker down through the darker days, literally and metaphorically; when the web of creation moves more *internally*; when the invasive vines of our own soil maybe go dormant, too, and allow us to dig a bit inward. This is as it should be: *our* natures in harmony *with* Nature. “Wake, Now, My Senses,” even as the earth's call is to slow down.

So I chose Awareness as an overall theme for this sermon heading into winter. But “*Slouching Toward Awareness*” may or may not ring any bells for you, referencing, as it does, a William Butler Yeats poem that has been formative for some of us, at least by giving lesser poets a way to work into our titles that evocatively docile word: slouch.

Like many people, Yeats was in a fiercely reflective mood after the horrors of World War I, when he crafted his poem called, “[The Second Coming](#),” which I take to be a reality check for Christians, and meaningful to others as well. It's always risky to excerpt from a poem, but here's my dangerous attempt to pull out just eight lines:

*Turning and turning in the widening gyre...
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world...
The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity.
Surely some revelation is at hand;
...And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,
Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?*

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Second_Coming_\(poem\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Second_Coming_(poem))

From then on, the durable phrase “Slouching towards Bethlehem” began appearing in various ways, along with derivatives galore, such as “Slouching toward adulthood... toward utopia... toward the ballot box, etc. My own contribution to this genre, *Slouching Toward Awareness*, helps me describe the often valuable but perhaps nonetheless ambivalent personal growth that comes with expanding our consciousness in one direction or another.

For instance, the inner landscape of our world may have to undergo radical adjustment upon becoming newly aware of some specific, previously hidden linkage to the past, personally or culturally. Sometimes this is a happy development, as when one finds a long-lost or unknown relative who shares meaningful genetic traits that encourage new bonds of affection.

But in less positive discoveries about our ancestors, it is often psychologically reasonable to resist such alterations, as in the struggle many of us have coming to grips with awareness of our icon Thomas Jefferson’s unflattering involvement with slavery and slaves.

I honor Warren for going directly after the deeper, disturbing story of his great grandfather. As the book so ably documents, his identity was forever changed by discovering “The Lyncher in Me,” even as he admirably addressed the repercussions as best he could. The seeds of invasive vines can linger, even if apparently out of sight.

Another example was in today’s online Washington Post. In Columbia, South America, some residents of that very Catholic country are discovering that they have Jewish family roots, going back to escapees from the Inquisition in Spain. So numerous evangelical Christians are evidently converting directly and happily to Judaism, a rather extreme identity shift.

http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/the_americas/from-colombian-evangelicals-to-jews-in-region-with-a-hidden-jewish-past/2012/11/23/04889712-2f2f-11e2-af17-67abba0676e2_story.html

And after a colleague and friend of mine on the east coast learned that his ancestors had been slave traders, he set about finding descendants of those specific slave families to seek new relationships based on his willingness to acknowledge the true dynamics of that earlier time. It’s a challenging row to hoe, and he’s one of many folks on this important individual journey that models how we as a culture might more fully acknowledge our collective history around slavery. They are not “slouching toward” but targeting their own connections to an uncomfortable past, as did Warren. And their current identities have likely shifted with greater awareness of their fuller lineages. I am emboldened by their example.

The piece of our uncomfortable past that has recently motivated the sloucher in me to look more closely at certain aspects of our collective history has been the urge of what’s been called “immigration justice.” Our ongoing national dance with immigration policies and attitudes continues to be clumsy at best, and too often outright oppressive, especially given that, as the chant goes, “We are all immigrants.”

I'm a second generation American on my Dutch father's side, with various ten Hoves inscribed on the American Immigrant Wall of Honor on Ellis Island at the mouth of the Hudson River (and technically in New Jersey side, I might add). My dad came over as a young child with his family after World War I.

But in our suburban Jersey home I grew up with very little sense of my father or family as immigrant. My identity was grounded more on my father's strong will to assimilate as thoroughly as possible. There were a few pieces of Dutch heritage on the walls around our home, and the relatives we'd occasionally visit way out on Long Island were very Dutch, but generally, my maturing self-identity had little awareness of this ethnicity, even despite my very ethnic name, which I thought was just inconvenient.

Nowadays, I'm aware that my family story, like many other European immigrants, is one of relatively easy "passing" into the dominant culture, largely because of the color of our skin. My father accomplished what he set out to do; he became thoroughly assimilated. And then, rather ironically, he could be counted among the distressingly large number of such folks who tend to look askance at newer immigrants, such as those from southern regions.

This seems to be a common pattern in American history, that one generation of frowned upon newcomers ends up scowling at the next group that shows up, all the way back to the Pilgrims, who were intolerant of all other religious sects that wanted the same freedom the Pilgrims came here seeking for themselves.

Today, if we are even willing to engage at all in any deeper analysis of the immigration issue, we are likely to struggle and ask: What is fair? What does "justice" really look like? Which group considerations trump others and why? Who gets to decide? Etc. There are many complicated and demanding aspects to this arena in an increasingly crowded country, but there's also another abiding, and usually avoided inquiry that underlies much of the current discussion:

What about Native Americans, the indigenous people of this land? They were here all along, and they encountered a degree of violent genocide that is hard to fully comprehend. Is there any justice for them? *"Wake, now, compassion, give heed to the cry."*

It is to that realm I now turn, because I am trying to reconcile my identity as an American with the history of our country's scandalous relationship with the folks who were already here when Europeans decided that they would take over the so-called "New World." I am convinced that this is an important root issue in our current national debate on immigration, let alone any possible immigration justice.

But I'm not content to just wallow in guilt that my Dutch ancestors were actively part of this—and were also instrumental in setting up that lovely system of Apartheid over in South Africa. I can find lots to feel ethnically and ethically guilty about.

But as a home-bred Unitarian Universalist, I do not generally find guilt to be a helpful force, nor do I linger at its doorstep for long. However, I do accept that the flow of history, cultural and personal, *is* an influence in my own evolving identity, and there are some ugly aspects that relate to me and my blood.

If I repress or deny the reality of this, it can't be healthy for me, ultimately, so I seek reconciliation, at least internally, although it also helps me to struggle together with others; thus the two study groups I've led in the past year, on "[Immigration as a Moral Issue](http://www.uua.org/immigration/re/moral/guide/index.shtml)"¹ and "[The Doctrine of Discovery](http://www.uua.org/immigration/reflection/192727.shtml)."² *"Wake, now, my conscience, with justice thy guide."*

1: www.uua.org/immigration/re/moral/guide/index.shtml 2: <http://www.uua.org/immigration/reflection/192727.shtml>

A lens I have learned to use when reexamining past injustices as they might relate to me and my own path, is to consider how my lot in life might be unduly advantaged by the oppression of others, even if that was conducted by ancestors long ago. Do I benefit from a history of injustice? If so, how might I at least acknowledge that? Answers may be hard to come by, but I think I at least need to honestly struggle with the question, and stay present to that struggle, rather than dismiss or avoid uncomfortable truths.

Using such a lens, for instance, I'm not yet convinced that I'm any better off because of Apartheid in South Africa. But in America, there's this pesky matter of European mistreatment of the indigenous people on this side of the Atlantic, who were no match for their attitude and sheer numbers. It is, of course, tricky business to ascribe to my life now a value based on actions taken by others long ago, but it is also very hard to avoid the conclusion that the early settlers arriving in waves from across the Pond had a mindset that put in motion events that have benefitted and enabled me, especially when compared to the lot of descendants from those original inhabitants.

I took both semesters of the Native American History course at the University of California while I was in seminary, and I can tell you that it was a steadily distressing experience that felt like scholastic self-flagellation. I have trouble even looking back at my notes without tearing up. I had known the gist of the disturbing abuse of the people of this land by Europeans, but the particulars were a deeper discovery that burned into my psyche.

I've also recently slouched toward awareness of the back-story of this invasion, and just how it was that Europeans were mightily empowered in their efforts to gain a foothold in this Western Hemisphere (as well as in other regions where colonization was attempted, such as Africa).

The Dutch were perhaps lesser players compared to the Spanish, Portuguese, English and French, but you may or may not realize that all these "explorers" were commissioned by a strong legal and religious authority that gave them a sense of immediate and divinely sanctioned ownership of the New World, based on the temperate-sounding word, "Discovery." The Unitarian Universalist Association Board of Trustees has been investigating this realm and a description of the Doctrine of Discovery in one of their documents is as good a summary as I've yet seen. (And if you're not

familiar with the term “Papal Bull,” it’s an elaborate document issued by the Pope in the form of a decree or privilege.)

The Doctrine of Discovery (also called the Doctrine of Christian Discovery) is a principle of law developed in a series of 15th century Papal bulls and 16th century charters by Christian European monarchs on the basis of which much of the rest of the world was explored and colonized by Europeans. It contained a theological justification of colonization that later became a nationalistic one.

An article in *Yes! Magazine* declared, “(The Doctrine of Discovery) was essentially a racist philosophy that gave white, Christian Europeans the green light to go forth and claim the lands and resources of non-Christian peoples and kill and enslave them—if other Christian Europeans had not yet already done so.”

Gale C. Toensing, Sept. 2009: <http://www.yesmagazine.org/peace-justice/episcopal-church-repudiates-doctrine-of-discovery>

For more than five centuries, the interpretive framework of the Doctrine of Discovery has been institutionalized and used to assert a presumed right of dominance over originally free and independent indigenous peoples. The Doctrine of Discovery was used by European nations to justify their conquest of Africa, Asia, Australia, New Zealand, and the Americas.

It was the justification—theological and political—for the appropriation of the lands and resources of indigenous peoples and efforts to dominate native nations and undermine the sovereignty of indigenous nations and peoples. Among other things, it formed the basis for the slave trade, the partition and colonization of the Near East, the colonization of the Americas, and the genocides of indigenous peoples in Africa and the Americas.

The Doctrine of Discovery is the basis for United States policy regarding native peoples. After the American Revolution, the tenets of Christian Discovery were continued by the new United States. In the U.S. Supreme Court ruling *Johnson v. M'Intosh* (1823), Chief Justice John Marshall wrote that “Christian people” who had “discovered” the lands of “heathens” had assumed the right of “ultimate dominion to be in themselves” and that this presumption of “dominion” had “diminished” the Indians' rights to complete sovereignty as independent nations, and had resulted in the Indians having a mere right of occupancy to their lands.

This decision stripped native nations of any and all sovereignty agreed to in treaties with the U.S. Unlike many regretful decisions of the past, this decision has never been overturned, and is still referred to in legal decisions on a regular basis... The Doctrine of Discovery is also foundational in the ways in which our nation's policies on migration and immigration are formed and enforced. Preventing indigenous peoples from crossing the U.S.-Mexico border to inhabit lands that are historically theirs is justified in U.S. law by the Doctrine of Discovery.

Slightly edited from “Background Information” found in a document called [Motion from the Right Relationship Monitoring Committee for the UUA Board of Trustees meeting, January 2012](http://www.uua.org/immigration/reflection/192727.shtml):

<http://www.uua.org/immigration/reflection/192727.shtml>

Elsewhere, there is an excellent, if somewhat technical summary of the 10 elements that comprise the Doctrine of Discovery, if you dare to want to find out more specifics—such as #7, perhaps the most galling one, called “Terra nullius,” using Latin to give it more weight, I suppose:

This phrase (“Terra nullius”) literally means land or earth that is null or void or empty... (If lands were not possessed or occupied by any person or nation, or even if they were occupied but were not being used in a fashion that European legal and property systems approved, then the lands were considered to be “empty” and available for Doctrine of Discovery claims. Europeans...often considered lands that were actually owned, occupied, and being used by Indigenous Peoples to be vacant and available for Discovery claims if they were not being “used” according to European and Euro-American laws and cultural mores.

From the end of [THE DOCTRINE OF DISCOVERY, A PRIMER](http://www.rd-ad.org/Doctrine_of_Discovery_Primer.doc), based on “The Doctrine of Discovery in American Indian Law” by Robert J. Miller — Lewis & Clark Law School — Idaho Law Review, Vol. 42, 2005
http://www.rd-ad.org/Doctrine_of_Discovery_Primer.doc

The subtitle of the Doctrine of Discovery Study Group I just finished leading was “Hidden in Plain Sight,” because this incredibly formative and influential “Doctrine” is so little known. How many of you had heard of the Doctrine of Discovery before, say, this past summer? [Of about 90 folks, one hand went up.]

It is a matter of historical record, but certainly not taught or even acknowledged, unless the U.S. Supreme Court needs justification for continuing the dominance, such as they did in 2005 in declaring that the Oneida tribe in NY State was liable for taxes on some of their supposedly sovereign land. The rationale included this explanation by the Supreme Court:

Under the ‘doctrine of discovery...’ fee title [ownership] to the lands occupied by Indians when the colonists arrived became vested in the sovereign—[meaning] first the discovering European nation and later the original states and the United States.

<http://www.law.cornell.edu/supct/html/03-855.ZO.html> (see Footnote 1)

That was all of seven years ago!

See: “Christian Discovery and Indian Sovereignty” by Steven Newcomb, in *Cultural Survival*, Summer 2005, online: <http://www.culturalsurvival.org/publications/cultural-survival-quarterly/united-states/christian-discovery-and-indian-sovereignty>

My point is that the deeper discovery I’ve made of this material, learning about how methodical the Europeans really were in justifying an arrogant commitment to their own superiority and entitlement, has changed me and my sense of identity. I’m not sure exactly how, yet, since this is relatively recent for me. I hope I am at least a bit more humble and energized to be more a part of the solution than the problem.

Basically, the Doctrine of Discovery connects us here to the spirit of the Inquisition, which I had previously been psychically able to avoid. They were each justified by the same attitude—and laws. Yikes. “*Wake, now my reason, reach out to the new.*”

I thought I understood Manifest Destiny, which may be the most obvious embodiment of the Doctrine of Discovery on our continent. It was professed to be a divinely inspired mission that stoked the engines of an often brutal European expansion. But Manifest Destiny was a notion, not a national policy. Little did I realize that there were indeed laws, long-standing and Christian, which backed it up and encouraged it.

My receptiveness to the immorality of the Doctrine of Discovery probably took root in the late 1960s, and thereafter, as I absorbed lessons from that formative and idealistic TV show, Star Trek. The adventures of the Star Trek crew pivoted on a so-called Prime Directive of non-interference when encountering other forms of life in the wilds of space. This just seemed to me to be the proper, if often demanding posture for every civilization in the Universe—non-interference—at least if one was interested in peace. There is certainly some cognitive dissonance between that ideal and the spirit of Manifest Destiny and the Inquisition.

We may hear a lot less about the now-obviously regrettable Manifest Destiny in our more enlightened 21st century. But here is the Doctrine of Discovery, still on the books and still actively, if quietly, cited as law. As we try to pursue peace through justice—a perhaps never-ending challenge, but worthy nonetheless—the Doctrine of Discovery lurks and looms.

So there is a two-pronged campaign underway, for about five years now, perhaps beginning to gain more traction now and well worth our awareness and support. It seeks primarily to officially repudiate the Doctrine of Discovery—get it off the books at least! And among religious groups, Episcopalians are leading the charge in this. I encourage your voice also raised in this direction, at whatever level you have or can have influence.

But more positively, this campaign promotes the 2007 [United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples](http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/DRIPS_en.pdf), just the reading of which will stir your soul. It awaits more complete acceptance at the U.N., and you can probably imagine where the U.S. government stands in relation to it, so again, your voice matters. http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/DRIPS_en.pdf

This *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* is a rigorous document, which, if integrated into dominant world cultures, could be a transformative dynamic, certain to inspire more peace and understanding. But it also could seriously alter the overall identity of our species, especially with its explicit grounding in the [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/index.shtml), another radically positive and transformative, if demanding document. <http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/index.shtml>

Both these carefully crafted Declarations are ambitious challenges to the global status quo, particularly in the West. I invite you to add them to your meditations, perhaps bit by bit—the 2007 Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and its parent, the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Read them and listen to your heart.

But beware: they may well alter your identity, as they have mine. I think this is for the better, but it does set me at increasing odds with the materialistic, escapist, xenophobic culture that surrounds and seduces me. Nevertheless: *“Wake, now, my vision of...a planet transformed by our care.”*

I also note that you can get a first hand experience of the entire *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* soon, when our local Interfaith Council reads it publically (noon, Town Hall Plaza) on each Dec. 10, the anniversary of its signing. It is usually an inspirational gathering for people of all ages, as we warm our interfaith bones by the guiding fire of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*.

Meanwhile, yes, winter’s a’comin’ on, and we—slouching toward introspection—seek a path of peace. Immigration justice calls to me in furtive, confusing episodes. Yet I avoid the invisible yet persistent seeds of invasive vines at my peril, imagining I can yank them out entirely. Upon deeper discovery, I find I must again and again honestly struggle with the dissonances that confront me.

Wake now, my senses. Surely some revelation is at hand. The inner landscape of my world has undergone radical adjustment as I become newly aware of previously hidden linkages to the past. I look in the deeper mirror and see an identity now in some flux. Maybe my behavior might even change, I don’t know. But there it is.

In cosmic balance whether we know it or not, we craft our sense of self as we bring remnants of the past with us, and, where possible, reweave with silken twine the uneven strands that might dangle precipitously.

I am guided by a teaching from the Jewish Talmud: *Do not be daunted by the enormity of the world’s grief. Walk humbly, now. Do justly, now. Love mercy, now. You are not obligated to complete the work, but neither are you free to abandon it.*

Let us discover deeply any greater awareness that heals and helps us on our way.

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FIND OUT MORE about The Doctrine of Discovery:

- *UUs Uniting* (website on this subject): <http://www.rd-ad.org>
- Doctrine of Discovery online study group: <http://www.doctrineofdiscovery.org>
- *Pagans in the Promised Land: Decoding the Doctrine of Christian Discovery*, by Steven T. Newcomb, 2012

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