

June 30, 2020

Dear Bethel Family,

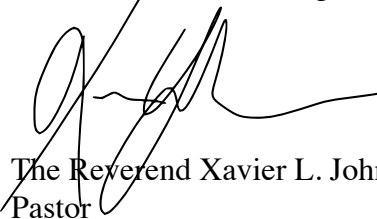
As we shift into our summer schedule, we will be launching “The Pastor’s Book Club.” I want to invite you to read with me in the month of July and engage in “in-depth”, thoughtful discussion on some of the pressing issues of our time. It is my prayer that this time together would be one of sharing and exchanging ideas as we read and think theologically about what it means to be people of faith.

As previously discussed, we will read *Stand Your Ground: Black Bodies and the Justice of God* by Kelly Brown Douglas. The book should be available for order at any major bookstore.

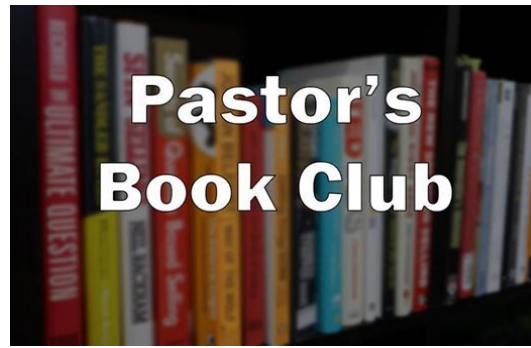
We will meet every Wednesday evening starting July 1, 2020 at 7 p.m. via Zoom. Attached you will find a description, tentative reading calendar, meeting schedule, and reading guide. Feel free to read at your own pace!

As Douglas says in her *Introduction*, “This book is an invitation to engage in the hard soul searching needed if our country is ever to become a safer place for our black sons and daughters.”

I look forward to sharing this time with you this summer.



The Reverend Xavier L. Johnson, D.Min.
Pastor



July 1- August 12, 2020

Please read this study guide *carefully*.

I recommend scheduling time each week to read the book and review the supplemental material included. Make your reading and study of the book a part of your daily devotion as you prayerfully engage in the book. If you fall behind, don't worry about it! Just keep going!

Description

This summer we will do a guided reading and study of *Stand Your Ground: Black Bodies and the Justice of God* using the book, author interviews, podcasts, and other supplemental learning materials. We will gather, virtually, weekly using Zoom. If you are unfamiliar with how to use Zoom, here are some links that you may find helpful. Please cut and paste them into your browser:

1. Using Zoom meeting on a desktop computer: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hIkCmbvAHQQ>
2. Using Zoom on a cell phone or tablet: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GVQ2v9sbte0>

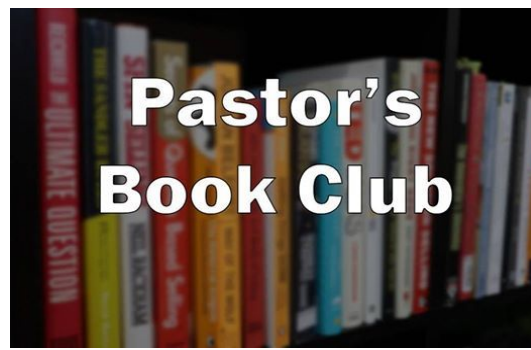
Book:

Douglas, Kelly Brown. *Stand Your Ground: Black Bodies and the Justice of God*. (Orbis, 2015). This book is readily available for order through most major bookstores or Amazon.com.

Schedule: Below is a schedule for our time together which includes the reading to be discussed and additional viewing, listening and/or reading materials that you may find helpful as you reflect on the book.

Date	Reading	Viewing and Listening	Supplemental Reading
Wed., July 1, 2020	Prologue and Introduction	Podcast: Episode 8 of Rewrite Radio- https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/8-kelly-brown-douglas-2016/id1191906911?i=1000382761525	https://sojo.net/articles/stand-your-ground-shows-racist-culture-continuing-kill

Date	Reading	Viewing and Listening	Supplemental Reading
Wed., July 8, 2020	Chapter 1	Interview: https://davidkrueger.org/2017/07/08/interview-wkelly-brown-douglas-stand-your-ground/	
Wed., July 15, 2020	Chapter 2	Podcast: AAR Plenary Session with Kelly Brown Douglas and Michelle Alexander- https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/2016-plenary-address-michelle-alexander-kelly-brown/id994565868?i=1000390633829	https://newdrugpolicy.org/2016/06/criminal_christ/
Wed., July 22, 2020	Chapter 3 and Excursus		https://feminismandreligion.com/2014/02/18/to-do-justice-for-jordan-davis-by-kelly-brown-douglas/
Wed., July 29, 2020	Chapter 4	https://btpbase.org/kelly-brown-douglas-claiming-gods-peace-when-whiteness-stands-its-ground/	
Wed., August 5, 2020	Chapter 5		https://www.christiancentury.org/blogs/archive/2015-05/ferguson-baltimore-black-americas-faith-tested
Wed., August 12, 2020	Chapter 6 and Epilogue	Douglas Lecture on King, Black Lives, and Stand Your Ground- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m0rYDQWb-M8	



Stand Your Ground: Black Bodies and the Justice of God **A Reading Guide**

Questions taken from a study guided created for ResourceUMC.org by Prof. Kristin Nicole Henning, The Agnes N. Williams Research Professor; Professor of Law at Georgetown University Law School

Organizing Your Thoughts:

1. "If Trayvon was of age and armed, could he have stood his ground on that sidewalk?"
-President Barack Obama
 - A. What is your answer to President Obama's question?
2. How often do you think about the subject of race? How often do you discuss it?

Questions for Reflection on the Prologue and Introduction:

1.
 - A. What motivated Kelly Brown Douglas to write *Stand Your Ground: Black Bodies and the Justice of God*? (p. ix.)
 - B. What questions does Douglas seek to answer in writing this book?
 - C. What else does she hope to accomplish? (pp. ix, xi, xiii)
2.
 - A. Where were you when you first heard about the killing of Trayvon Martin (February 26, 2012)?
 - B. What impact did that killing have on you?
 - C. What outraged you?
 - D. What surprised you, if anything, about this killing and the nation's response?
3.
 - A. If you were alive when Emmett Till was lynched (August, 1955), do you remember where you were at the time?
 - B. What impact did that lynching have on you?
 - C. What social, cultural, and political similarities do you see between the killing of Trayvon and the lynching of Emmett Till?
4.
 - A. How did black churches initially respond to Trayvon Martin's killing? (p. xii)
 - B. How have black churches continued to respond to the killing of black bodies?
 - C. What more should we be doing? (How did your church respond?)
5. What are the unique challenges of raising a black son in America? (p. xi)

6. As you contemplate the full title of Kelly Brown Douglas' book, *Stand Your Ground: Black Bodies and the Justice of God*.
 - A. What questions do you have about the "justice of God"?
 - B. How do we understand the justice of God in the face of killings of young black boys like Trayvon Martin?
7. Study the artistic cover of *Stand Your Ground: Black Bodies and the Justice of God*.
 - A. What are the key features of the cover?
 - B. What meaning do these key features signify for you?
8. Before reading Douglas' book:
 - A. What did you know about "stand your ground" laws?
 - B. What are the social and cultural implications of stand your ground laws as you currently understand them?
9. After looking at the "Table of Contents":
 - A. What do you hope to get out of Douglas' book.
 - B. What are you most excited about or most interested in?

Questions for Reflection on Chapter 1:

1.
 - A. What is the Anglo-Saxon myth and how did it evolve? (pp. 6-7)
 - B. How did this myth move from England to America? (pp. 7-11)
 - C. What role did religious reformers play in transporting and legitimizing the Anglo-Saxon myth to America? (pp. 8-11)
 - D. The 98 C.E. text *Germania*, written by Roman historian Tacitus, has been called "one of the most dangerous books ever written." (p. 4) Why?
 - E. What are the key premises of *Germania*? (pp. 4-6)
2. Kelly Brown Douglas describes democracy and freedom as two key components of the Anglo-Saxon myth. (p. 10) How do these themes play out within the myth?
3. How did influential national leaders like Thomas Jefferson perpetuate Anglo-Saxon chauvinism? (pp. 11-12)
4. According to Kelly Brown Douglas, what are the two religious' "canopies" that legitimized the Anglo-Saxon myth? (pp. 9, 12-14)
5. What does the term "America's exceptionalism" mean? (p.15)
6. How did America's exceptionalism transform from its initial institutional focus (i.e., democracy, liberty, institutional rights) to its subsequent racial focus? (pp. 15-23)
7. What role did Benjamin Franklin play in that shift? (pp. 16-17)
8. What role did Ralph Waldo Emerson play in that shift? (pp. 18-21, 23-25)

9. What role did Romanticism and philological studies (the study of human origins) play in that shift? (pp. 18-21)
10. How did America's social and political leaders connect race and language in their quest for human origins and in their understanding and articulation of the narrative of America's exceptionalism? (pp. 21-22)
11. How was science used to manipulate or manufacture Anglo-Saxon superiority? (p. 25)
12. A. How was religion used to legitimate America's exceptionalism? (p. 25)
B. Why was it so important to validate exceptionalism through religion?
13. Kelly Brown Douglas writes that "Anglo-Saxons are not native to American soil. ... And those native to American soil are decidedly not Anglo-Saxon." (p. 27) How does this Anglo-Saxon immigrant reality create a "paradox" for America's exceptionalism and the Anglo-Saxon myth? (pp. 27-28)
14. A. What was President Roosevelt's strategy (and the strategy of other presidents) for protecting the Anglo-Saxon identity of America and regulating the influx of immigrants? (pp. 29-33)
B. What immigration laws emerged as an effort to protect America's exceptionalism? (pp. 31-33)
C. How do those laws compare to contemporary immigration legislation?
15. How did the Protestant Evangelical community respond to the influx of new immigrants and seek to protect the Anglo-Saxon myth? (pp. 33-34)
16. A. How did the "new stock" of immigrants use their "whiteness" to negotiate their security, power, and American identity? (pp. 34-40)
B. How and why did this new stock of immigrants construct their new identity in opposition to blackness? (pp. 36-40)
17. A. What does Kelly Brown Douglas mean when she writes about "whiteness as cherished property"? (pp. 40-44)
B. What does W.E.B. DuBois mean when he talks about the "wages of whiteness"? (p. 41)
C. How does blackness get constructed as sin and whiteness as sacred property? (pp. 42-43)
18. According to Kelly Brown Douglas, what is the "stand your ground culture" and how does it protect whiteness? (p. 44)
19. A. What advice and strategies does Kelly Brown Douglas offer for raising black sons (p. 46)
B. Do these strategies resonate with you? What strategies would you add?

Questions for Reflection on Chapter 2:

1. Kelly Brown Douglas talks about the "theo-ideological" framework that has evolved to subordinate black bodies. (pp. 50-51)

- A. What does Douglas mean by this?
 - B. How does the Theo-ideological framework of black threat protect the grand narrative of America's exceptionalism and justify brutal assault on black bodies? (p. 50)
 - C. How does this play out today?
2. What is St. Thomas of Aquinas' theory of natural law and how did that theory work to exclude blacks from citizenship and humanity? (pp. 51-52, 56) How was the very fact of black enslavement used to demonstrate that blacks were "meant to be" subordinated and enslaved? (pp. 56-57)
 3.
 - A. What does it mean to be a "commodified body"?
 - B. What implications does commodification (or the designation of the black body as "chattel") have on the natural and legal "rights" of black people? (pp. 52-55)
 4.
 - A. How did whites use the theory of natural law to portray black freedom as sin and wickedness? (pp. 58-59)
 5.
 - A. How does the Anglo-Saxonist natural law cast God as both Anglo-Saxon and a white supremacist? (p. 60)
 - B. How does this conceptualization of natural law contradict central doctrines of Christian faith? (pp. 60, 64)
 - C. How does this conceptualization contradict black faith? (p. 60)
 6. How does the theory of natural law "morally compel" whites to protect their freedom and prevent intrusion into white spaces? (p. 60)
 7.
 - A. How did whites use science or "religion-science" to support different creation narratives for whites and blacks? (pp. 61-64)
 - B. Who was Louis Agassiz and what is polygenetic religious science? (p. 61-64)
 8.
 - A. What is the narrative of the "hypersexualized black body"? (pp. 64-68)
 - B. What purpose did this narrative originally serve for whites? (pp. 65-70)
 - C. How did whites come to see the hypersexualized black body as a hyperviolent, threatening body? (p. 67)
 - D. What purpose does this narrative continue to serve in American society?
 9.
 - A. How is "freedom" for blacks uniquely dangerous according to the theory of natural law? (pp. 68-69)
 - B. How does black freedom endanger the narrative of white supremacy and Anglo-Saxon exceptionalism? (pp. 68-69)
 - C. How did the "free black male" become the greatest peril of the post-emancipation era? (pp. 70-74)
 10.
 - A. According to philosopher Michel Foucault, how does power (especially inequitable power) operate to sustain unjust social structures, even in the absence of brutal force? (pp. 74-75)
 - B. How does Foucault's analysis help us understand the subtle way in which the images of the "black body as chattel" and "the black body as a violent body" were

implanted into the collective psyche of the American society to legitimize the social, political, and institutional constructs of power itself?

11. A. How has the notion of the “black body as chattel” survived after the era of chattel slavery?
B. How has the concept been transformed in the 21st Century? (p. 76)
12. How was the notion of the “black body as criminal body” constructed and embedded in American society during Reconstruction (1865-77)? (pp. 77-81)
13. A. How has the mass media replaced religion and science to become the new promoter of the black body as a criminal body and a guilty body? (pp. 81-84, 86)
B. What is the new “evidence” that the black body is criminal?
14. How have black women been portrayed in the media? (pp. 84-85)
15. How does Kelly Brown Douglas answer the question “Why are black murder victims put on trial”? (p. 87)
16. Kelly Brown Douglas prays that black children like Jordan Davis, will be seen as the children of God, whom they are. (p. 89) What prayers do you have for black children?

Questions for Reflection on Chapter 3

- A. What is Manifest Destiny and how did it originate? (pp. 96-97, 93-94)
- B. What are the prevailing themes of America’s notion of manifest destiny? (pp. 95-98)
- C. How are land and race connected in America’s narrative of manifest destiny? (pp. 96-100)
2. Why was America’s Manifest Destiny project so urgent both at home and abroad? (pp. 97-100)
3. A. What did John Quincy Adams mean when he suggested that the success of Manifest Destiny required the United States to be a unified nation? (pp. 99 – 101)
B. What implications did that have for Native Americans and African Americans? (pp. 100- 102)
4. A. How did race dictate the right to life and land? (pp. 101-02)
B. What does Manifest Destiny say about who is destined to live and who is eligible for extinction (i.e. extermination)? (pp. 102, 108)
5. A. How were religion-scientific theories used to support America’s claims of Manifest Destiny and to justify white domination and extinction of non-white races? (pp. 102- 04)
B. How do we understand the term “melting pot” today?
C. How was the concept of “melting away” understood before the early 20th-Century? (p. 103)
6. Read Exodus 3:7-22 and Deuteronomy 31:3-8:
A. How have Black Americans traditionally read and understood the Exodus narrative?
B. How did white American settlers use the Exodus story as biblical precedent (and theological justification) for America’s Manifest Destiny? (pp. 105- 106)

- C. How do we as black Christians grapple with this treatment of the Exodus as a narrative of domination instead of liberation? (p. 106)
- D. How does this reading of Exodus challenge our faith and our understanding of liberation theology?
7. A. How does the narrative of Anglo-Saxon exceptionalism exonerate whites from immoral, dehumanizing and even deadly treatment of non-white bodies? (p. 107)
- B. How does Manifest Destiny become a declaration of war against nonwhite bodies who refuse to assimilate? (pp. 108-09)
8. A. What was the Monroe Doctrine? (pp. 109-10)
- B. How did it embody the arrogance of America?
9. A. How is the war of Manifest Destiny a religious war? (pp. 110-111)
- B. What is the “just war theory”?
- C. What are the six purported requirements for a just war? (p. 111)
10. A. What is the stand-your-ground culture that Kelly Brown Douglas describes in this text? (p. 112)
- B. How does the contemporary stand-your-ground culture carry out the war of Manifest Destiny today? (pp. 112-14)
11. How did the Anglo-Saxon Manifest Destiny mission of land, race, and life intrude on Native American bodies? (pp. 113-14)
12. A. What is the Stand Your Ground law? (p. 114)
- B. What events led to the first Stand Your Ground law? (p. 114)
- C. What role did the NRA and organizations like the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC) play in the passage of Stand Your Ground laws across the country? (p. 115)
- D. What implications do these laws and support from these organizations have on black bodies? (pp. 114-15)
13. Kelly Brown Douglas contends that the stand-your-ground culture has been most aggressive after every historical period in which new “rights” were extended to blacks (e.g., after emancipation, after the civil rights era, and after the election of the first black president).(p. 117) What evidence supports Douglas’ position throughout history? (pp. 116-25)
14. A. How does the current stand-your-ground culture that contributed to Trayvon Martin’s death mirror the culture of lynching that led to Emmett Till’s death in 1955? (pp. 121 –22)
- B. How do these deaths challenge our understanding of God and justice?
15. A. How did restrictive housing laws protect cherished white culture? (p. 123)
- B. How did the U.S. Supreme Court assist in protecting white space in the housing debate? (p. 123)
- C. How has the Supreme Court continued to protect white space in and beyond the housing context?

16. A. What strategies did white politicians adopt after the 1960s civil rights struggle to return black bodies back to chattel slavery? (pp. 125 -26)
 B. How were land, space, race, and life linked in the War on Drugs and the criminalization of blackness? (pp. 127-29)
17. How did blacks seem to threaten the core of America's exceptionalist identity in the civil rights era? (p. 127)

Questions for Reflection on Chapter 4

1. Two faith narratives emerge from the Exodus story: What are they and how do they differ? (p. 137)
2. Black Christians have always had to grapple with the contradictions and paradox of black faith. (pp. 138-39) How did black faith persist in the face of slavery?
3. A. According to Kelly Brown Douglas, what is faith? (p. 139)
 B. How do blacks negotiate the space between black life and black hope? (p. 140)
4. Throughout this chapter, Kelly Brown Douglas collects faith testimonies (e.g., spirituals) of black enslaved bodies (pp. 140-154):
 A. Which, if any, of these speak to you?
 B. What role did music play in black protest to America's exceptionalism? (pp. 141-44)
5. What does Kelly Brown Douglas mean by the "freedom of God" and what implications does God's freedom have for blacks and their faith? (pp. 143-44)
6. A. Who is the Great High God that blacks met in Africa before they were captured and enslaved in America? (pp. 144-47)
 B. How is that God different from the God of the slaveholders? (pp. 144, 147-49)
7. Kelly Brown Douglas highlights an African principle that everything the Great High God creates has sacred value because it is intrinsically connected to God (p. 150):
 A. What implications did this principle have for enslaved blacks and their conviction that black bodies were not created to be enslaved? (pp. 150-53)
 B. Who is Henry Highland Garnett and what did he have to say to enslaved blacks about God and freedom? (p. 152)
8. According to Kelly Brown Douglas, what is the significance of Trayvon Martin "trying to get home" on the night he was killed? (pp. 153-54)
9. How did black faith provide a counter-narrative to the grand narrative of Anglo-Saxon exceptionalism? (pp. 154-56)
10. A. How did enslaved black Americans identify with the Exodus story? (p. 157-59)
 B. According to African-American readings of the Exodus narrative, what moved God to act? (pp. 157-58)
 C. How does Kelly Brown Douglas help us understand the concept of "chosen-ness" in the Exodus story? (pp. 159-60)

11. A. How do we reconcile the aspects of the Exodus story that allow for the occupation of an inhabited land of the Canaanites and others? (pp. 160-61)
 B. How do we understand the perspective of the Canaanites who were displaced?
 C. What additional problems and challenges does theologian Delores Williams highlight in the Exodus story? (p. 161)
 D. How does Kelly Brown Douglas attempt to reconcile these challenges? (pp. 162-63)
12. A. What is the paradox of black faith? (pp. 164-65)
 B. Like James Cone and Howard Thurman, Kelly Brown Douglas contends that black faith is not passive. What evidence does she offer to support that assertion?
 (pp. 165-66)
13. A. According to Kelly Brown Douglas, what does the story of Abraham and Isaac mean in the black faith tradition? (p. 164)
 B. How would you describe black faith after the killing of Trayvon Martin? (p. 168)

Questions for Reflection on Chapter 5

1. What are the similarities between Jesus' crucifixion and Trayvon Martin's killing?
 (pp. 171-72)
2. A. What was the purpose of lynching? (p. 173)
 B. How is Trayvon perceived and treated as a threat even in death? (p. 173)
3. A. How and why did the media and supporters of Trayvon's killer try to vilify or criminalize Trayvon in his death?
 B. How did Trayvon's parents respond to these efforts? (pp. 189-93)
4. A. How did Jesus align himself with the "most scorned and marginalized bodies of his day"? (pp. 174-78)
 B. How does the crucifixion affirm Jesus' identification with the "Trayvons" and other victims of the stand-your-ground culture of today? (p. 174)
5. Kelly Brown Douglas argues that the cross represents the height of humanity's inhumanity. (pp. 180-81) What are the "evil crosses" of today?
6. Douglas writes of restoration and resurrection of life in the Bible. How have Trayvon Martin and all the other black males who were gunned down been "restored to life"? (pp 181-82)
7. A. How does Kelly Brown Douglas define "violence" and "non-violence"? (pp. 183-84)
 B. According to Douglas, how does God respond to violence? (pp. 183-84)
 C. Why did Martin Luther King opt for nonviolence? (pp. 184-85)
 D. Do you believe "violence" is an appropriate and viable response to racial injustice today?
8. A. What is "redemptive suffering"? p. 186
 B. What is the danger of "redemptive suffering" and efforts to find meaning in suffering?
 (pp. 186-88)
9. Kelly Brown Douglas describes stand-your-ground as a culture of sin (pp. 193-96):

- A. How does she define sin? (p. 194)
 - B. How does the stand-your-ground culture foster both individual sin and “systemic and structural sin”? (p. 195)
10. According to Kelly Brown Douglas and liberation theologian Gustavo Gutierrez, what does salvation mean in a stand-your-ground culture? (pp. 195-196)
 11. What does Douglas mean when she writes of “original sin”? (pp. 196-97)
 12. A. How does Douglas define God’s justice?
B. How will God’s justice be realized? (pp. 197-98)
 13. A. What responsibilities do churches (including white churches) have in a stand-your-ground culture? (pp. 198-202)
B. According to Kelly Brown Douglas’ research and assessment, why have white churches remained silent? (p. 200)
C. Should black churches partner with and/or agitate white churches in the fight for racial equity today, and if so, how?
 14. At the beginning of the chapter, Douglas poses a difficult question: “Where was God when Trayvon was slain?” (p. 172): How would you answer that question?

Questions for Reflection on Chapter 6

1. A. What is *kairos*?
B. Do you agree with Kelly Brown Douglas that we are in a *kairos* time? (pp. 206-07)
2. How have prophetic black voices emerged throughout history to hold the nation accountable in the stand-your-ground wars that have violated the freedoms and lives of blacks? (pp. 207-08, 212-18)
3. A. What key events occurred in the *kairos* time of Martin Luther King’s era (i.e., what key events occurred in American history in the months leading up to King’s “I Have a Dream” speech?) (pp. 210-11)
B. How did King’s speech expose a nation at war with itself? (p. 212)
4. A. Where were you when you heard Martin Luther King, Jr. give his “I Have A Dream” speech?
B. What did that speech mean to you? (pp. 208-09)
5. How did John F. Kennedy expose and challenge the contradictions of American exceptionalism? (pp. 211-12)
6. A. How did Martin Luther King bring together two faith traditions – that of a nation and that of the black community – in his “I Have a Dream” speech? (pp. 212-13)
B. How did King describe the black faith tradition? (pp. 213-14)
C. How did King describe the nation’s sacred obligations? (pp. 214-15)
D. How did King strategically call upon America’s faith, in his demand for black freedom and justice? (pp. 214-15)

7. Kelly Brown Douglas says that King uses the black faith tradition to “signify” upon America’s sense of exceptionalism. (pp. 208, 215):
 - A. What does she mean by this?
 - B. What examples does she offer? (p. 215)
8. How does Mary Church Terrell signify against America’s exceptionalism? (p. 217)
9. According to Kelly Brown Douglas, what is “moral memory” and why is it essential for change and progress? (pp. 221-22)
10.
 - A. What is “moral identity”?
 - B. How does moral identity aid progress? (p. 223)
11.
 - A. What is “moral participation”? (pp. 223-24)
 - B. What is praxis as defined by Gustavo Gutierrez? (p. 224)
 - C. How will you personally fulfill the call to moral participation?
12.
 - A. What is “moral imagination”?
 - B. How does moral imagination help us envision a way forward? (pp. 225-26)

Questions for Reflection on the Epilogue

1. In Matthew’s account of Jesus’ birth, he recalls Jeremiah’s image of Rachel weeping at Ramah (Matthew 2:18). (p. 228):
 - A. Why is Rachel weeping?
 - B. According to Kelly Brown Douglas, how is Rachel’s weeping a sign of both deep grief and great hope? (p. 228)
 - C. How is Rachel’s weeping juxtaposed with the birth of Jesus?
2.
 - A. How did the death of Michael Brown replay the narrative of America’s exceptionalism?
 - B. What strategies did the police and the media use to maintain the stand-your-ground culture after Michael Brown’s death? (pp. 229-31)
3.
 - A. What can black mothers do in this stand-your-ground culture?
 - B. How do they draw upon their faith in God? (p. 232)