



Episode 166: A Day of Racial Healing (Transcript)

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Ike Evans: Hi. Welcome to "Into the Fold," the Mental Health podcast. I'm your host, Ike Evans. And for this first podcast of the New Year, we are coming in hot on a cold day in January with a look back at the National Day of Racial Healing.

Dr. Angela Ward: So it's a stark reminder to the necessary work that is getting to know people, building community, building relationships, and creating that space for connection, especially when we're talking about race.

Ike Evans: The National Day of Racial Healing is a nationwide observance that also coincides with Martin Luther King Day. For the second year in a row, the Hogg Foundation joined the celebration by holding an event in Austin, this time in partnership with Austin Justice Coalition, a local nonprofit dedicated to improving quality of life for people who are Black, Brown, and poor in the Austin community. It was on Sunday, January 14th, the day right before MLK Day, that I and about 80 other people braved the cold for a day of facilitated dialogue, fellowship, music, a dab of spoken-word poetry, and food. I take you now to my interview with our two facilitators from the day, Dr. Angela Ward and Dr. Mary Rice-Boothe. They are both educators who write, speak, facilitate, and think deeply on matters of equity. Enjoy!

Ike Evans: Okay, so coming at you from our second National Day of Racial Healing, I am at Northeast Early College High School in Austin, once upon a time Reagan High School. And Dr. Ward and Mary were kind enough to kind of lead our participants through some reflections on racial healing. Mary, let's start with you because you--what brings you here and what your goal was for taking part in the event today?

Dr. Mary Rice-B...: Well, first, Angela, Dr. Ward, is the one that brought me here. So thank you for inviting me. Why I was excited to be a part of this day is obviously the fact that it's connected to Dr. Martin Luther King Day, and that is a holiday that has been always instrumental from the time when I was in high school. Where I grew up, it wasn't still yet a national holiday, so we had to elect to celebrate it or not. And

so it's always been something that I always elected to do. And so being able to be a space where the focus is on not just re-traumatizing but actually on healing made it a really powerful invitation that I wanted to accept.

Ike Evans: Okay. Angela, anything? Just whatever you'd like to follow that up with.

Dr. Angela Ward: So I was excited to accept the Austin Justice Coalition invited me to join in and to help set the space and the tone for the day to help people reflect on what racial healing is, what really thinking about the national day. And as Mary and I talked about, what it would look like and sound like and feel like to invite people into the space, both of us thought of the word love. And we really wanted to focus on the word love, healing, and then as well as connection. And so those three words became the focal point of how we would invite everyone in today. And so we were excited to engage in conversation, and to see the people come out today was amazing in this very cold weather that we're having.

Ike Evans: For Austin, this is a very cold day. I want to comment on the shirts that y'all are wearing. [Dr. Mary Rice-Boothe and Dr. Angela Ward laugh] Let me start with yours, Mary. So I am reading--for our listeners, Mary's shirt says, "Drink water, love hard, fight racism." So how does that sentiment tie into your feelings about today?

Dr. Mary Rice-B...: I mean, I think the phrases in the order that they're in is pretty intentional. So it's the idea of drinking water I think is a part of making sure that you take care of yourself and the power that water has to fill your body, to nourish your body, and it's kind of the first thing you want to think about. I think "love hard" has to talk about the interpersonal relationships that we all are engaged in. And then in order to do this--in order for us to fight racism, which is the last phrase, you need to be able to love folks unconditionally. And I just love the idea of loving hard means that you are in it with each other for the long haul. And then obviously, fight racism is why we're here and why we need collectively to be able to do that on an everyday basis.

Ike Evans: And Angela, your turn. So your shirt reads, "Don't judge my story by the chapter you walked in on."

Dr. Angela Ward: So I love this shirt. I actually bought it at a National Association for Community and Restorative Justice Conference last year. Last summer I think it was--maybe it's two summers ago in Chicago. And it was being sold by a youth group who do restorative work in their community, I believe in Chicago. Sorry, I didn't get a chance to look it up before I came. But that group of students really--when I saw this shirt, I'm like, "I need that shirt." Because when you think about they use the shirt to remind each other and to remind others who would judge teens basically just by seeing them not knowing who they are, just sizing them up based on their appearance, their clothes, their hair, whatever the case may be. And that's the insidiousness of race. That's what happens to us in society is we're judged and just because you look a certain way, people are making assumptions about who you are and what you are and what you may stand for.

So yeah, this shirt speaks volumes about the fact that people will judge without ever knowing someone. And so it's a stark reminder to the necessary work that is getting to know people, building community, building relationships, and creating that space for connection, especially when we're talking about race.

Ike Evans: This is just one day, and racial healing, however you define it, is not going to happen because of any one event or any one conversation. And so, that kind of gets me wondering how you define success [Dr. Mary Rice-Boothe and Dr. Angela Ward laugh] for just one conversation and what that looks like to either of you.

Dr. Angela Ward: Yeah, for me, success in this day first was people came. The numbers of people that actually came out today was very encouraging. They see the value in this conversation. And success to me beyond that is people will leave with some type of connection either to something within their personal story and something that they need to work on for themselves. And--or they've made a connection to someone, like I'm making connections myself, to someone who can further this work and further their reach to support other people and to make a mark on influencing how each of us experiences connecting around race and connecting around the healing from race. Having conversations with people who are from different countries, different parts of the city, different parts of the state, different parts of our country, the US who have different experiences and those experiences fuel how we're able to expand our view of how to have these conversations.

Dr. Mary Rice-B...: The only thing I would add would be the idea of just awareness and the desire to want to continue to do the work. So exactly one day is not going to make the transformation, but one day we'll hopefully be able to create some interest in what you heard, interest in what I experienced and say how do I keep going? And how do I keep doing this for myself, for those, my community and beyond? And so I think that's would be additional goal that we want to make sure that folks walk away with today from.

Ike Evans: Okay. One thing I do notice, however, is there's also at the same time a certain level of fatigue that people have with conversations having to do with race. And so, how do y'all navigate that as facilitators?

Dr. Angela Ward: For me, I try to humanize this work, and I try to help people see the impact on them in a different way by thinking about how they're experiencing society and how society sees difference. And so, to combat the issue around race, I really focus on the word difference, and I focus on the uniqueness and the asset that is difference. And for me, I try to flip it on its head. So we're not talking about the negative as much. However, we're talking about negative but flipping it on its head and pivoting in a way that helps us think about--and how can we address this in our own personal sphere. I have control over this one thing about racism, and I'm going to do everything I can in this realm, but I'm also not going to do it by myself. I'm going to find people to partner with. Mary's one of my partners in crime. We partner up with each other because we each have a

different perspective, and we have different fields and spheres that we can combine together to make a bigger difference.

Dr. Mary Rice-B...: [inaudible 00:11:40] There's different types of conversations. When I go back to courageous conversations about race and that compass. And as an educator, it's really easy for me to have an academic conversation and try to make it very theoretical. But actually, do I have a conversation that's more about emotion? And also making sure that the conversation actually gets to action. And so I think there's conversations that we like to have that we feel--also we feel good about. And then there's actually the conversation that actually make a difference. And so I think that's the importance to always preface conversations, "Where do we actually want to go today?" And then actually check to make sure that we actually got there and it wasn't just a feel-good conversation, but it was one that actually moves to action.

Ike Evans: I'm just so--Without recapitulating y'all's entire personal journeys that brought you to this point today, I'm always interested in just the personal watershed moments that people have had kind of on the way toward whatever level of experience or expertise they lay claim to. So for both of y'all, just personal moments that really crystallized for you, I guess first of all, what racial healing can be but then whatever would make you feel qualified to speak on that.

Dr. Mary Rice-B...: When I think about what was my watershed moment, I think about the fact of when I noticed a pattern--in my own personal experience, when I noticed the fact that what I was experiencing as a Black woman in the United States was just like my mother was experiencing, now just like my daughter was experiencing, I said, "This is not just a me problem. This is not just a me experience, but this is a generational experience," and how do I be part of the fact they're trying to dismantle that generational oppression? And so I think that was my watershed moment. And then, "Okay, so now how do I make sure that I actually have the tools in order to actually get that done?" And again, I'm an educator, academic type of person, so I go there first. But I also want to make sure that I have the experience and the interaction with folks. So I feel like from my own personal experience and then moving from being a teacher, then moving from being a facilitator, and then also going really deep into what does research look like around healing. I think all of those together provides me a space to be able to come into today's space and not just be somebody who's up here trying to facilitate, but I can also bring my own experience and my own perspective into the room at the same time.

Dr. Angela Ward: Watershed moment I would say--so my bachelor's degree is in criminal justice, and I learned through my studies deeply about the school-to-prison pipeline. And I tied that back to growing up in Houston and people that I would go to vacation bible school with. We literally--the choir, when I was a young adult, we sang at a prison, and I saw faces at the prison that I went to vacation bible school with as a child. And by then, I understood the school-to-prison pipeline, and I wanted to disrupt, break it up, bust it up. One of our friends has an org that's "Break the Pipeline." I wanted to find a way to create the opportunities

for us, people that look like me, Black, Brown, indigenous people that are caught up in the system. I wanted to find a way to eliminate that, and God brought me to education.

Dr. Angela Ward: I wasn't trying to be a teacher, but teaching found me. And so, I ended up teaching first grade because I deeply understood the school to prison pipeline and I knew the data. I knew the data said these little Black boys in my classroom, if they're not reading by the time they get out of my classroom, I've doomed them to a life of imprisonment, incarceration. And so it was very important to me that every child was reading, every child was communicating, every child was comprehending. And it's been pretty much my life's work to make sure that educationally I'm doing everything I can to break that pipeline.

Dr. Angela Ward: And so, as much as when I became a teacher coach and a coach of superintendents and a coach of directors of professional learning, my goal has always been "how do I help them find within themselves space to humanize the children that end up as widgets on a piece of paper, on a spreadsheet?" Because that's how central office level people, they look at schools and students as widgets, they count them. And I found ways in our professional learning to make sure that the adults who never engaged with the child in their daily work saw that spreadsheet as representation of supporting a child in the classroom, supporting the teacher who would then support all the children in the classroom. And so yeah, the watershed was realizing that people at central office also--that they didn't realize that--well, no, I never talk to kids. I never do anything with children. My job is to make sure that this budget is on target. Well, if that budget is off a penny, then you've impacted this many children, you've impacted this many teachers. They're not going to be able to fulfill the needs of the students because that budget was off for a penny. And it shifted the way people began to think about their work. And we were able to have deeper conversations using, like Mary was saying, using the compass. We used the courageous conversations about race protocol to really help the adults have conversations about difference.

Ike Evans: So if we're imagining a two-way dialogue, what are some of the most common either objections to any of the points that either you explicitly make or just I guess forms of resistance or recalcitrant that you come across? And if you could give a sense of your rhetorical repertoire for dealing with those kinds of moments.

Dr. Angela Ward: Yeah, I have one right away.

Dr. Mary Rice-B...: I have a couple.

Dr. Mary Rice-B...: I mean, the first one that comes up to me is it's not always about race. And folks to wanting to bring in sexuality or gender or different types of other types of identity. And always my response to that is like, "yes, intersectionality matters, but when you keep crossing the data, race and gender, race and sexuality, race and socioeconomic status, the same--the data that is--the constant is race." So

we can't not talk about it. And the fact is that it's a common denominator. So in order for us to actually have any type of movement or any type of progress, we need to actually have that conversation around the common denominator. So that's the very first one that comes to my mind, and that's usually my response.

Dr. Angela Ward: I mean, a few things came to mind thinking about having to dig out of issues with.

Dr. Angela Ward: I thought about--One came to mind with me with regards to intersectionality because my role in the district was to help people really focus on difference. And for me, as an anti-racist educator, anti-racism involves intersectionality, and we have to hold race as the common denominator. And so, I recall a conversation with a small group of teachers in elementary school where we were trying to get them to understand the issue of requiring a boy/girl and--a boy line and a girl line at elementary school and not giving students the opportunity to just be in a line. You can number the children and tell them, "Okay..." And it's a math lesson. "Even numbers here, odd numbers there." You can do all kinds of stuff with the number line and children's bodies. But teachers were hell-bent on boy line, girl line. And then this particular conversation, we were--I was using some flashcards with notes from history about people who were LGBTQ, and not many know that Bayard Rustin, MLK's speech writer, was openly gay. If you haven't seen that movie, you need to watch it.

Dr. Angela Ward: And I had a teacher say, "I don't care who he slept with." And I'm like, "Help me understand how we go from sexual orientation to who somebody slept with?" And like, it is not about sex, it's about a whole bunch of other things. And so, I had to have a conversation with the teacher. Sexual orientation is not about that. It's not about sex. It's not about the act. And we had to have a conversation, too, about--and when you require a child who may live in a home where the family is allowing them to discover themselves, you're then saying what their parents are allowing them to do is wrong. But your place as an educator is to create space for all children, especially in a public school. Like we are paid by taxpayers. We're not paid by private corporations...yet. It's coming. But issues like that, and also using the courageous conversations about race protocol, people would get pissed when I would invite them to experience discomfort.

Dr. Angela Ward: Everything about race and conversations about race is uncomfortable because it's a taboo subject, and it's something that we're not supposed to talk about. And so, people would feel like they were being pressured to experience discomfort. And so I started to shift, and I still do it to this day. I use agreements as an invitation, and I have to name it, and I put it down on paper, and I say it out loud. I haven't changed the agreements. I just change how I introduce them. And I say, "It's an invitation because I can't require you to do anything, but by the simple fact that you showed up to this space today, can we agree that these are some things that we're going to need to engage with?"

Ike Evans: Okay. Yeah, that was...Thank you for that because I realize that there's an art to having these kinds of conversations, and people are at different levels of readiness to either listen or to speak. And so, yeah, I would assume that over time you developed this repertoire for navigating those kinds of moments. And so that's what I was hoping to get at. And y'all rose to the challenge. [Dr. Mary Rice-Boothe and Dr. Angela Ward laugh] Beautiful. I'd just like to know more about how y'all mind your own wellness in the midst of everything else that y'all have going on.

Dr. Mary Rice-B...: Yeah, it's been iterative for me. I think number one, I am a runner, and so that's something that I do start my day with. And it is something that's incredibly important for me to be able to have that, to start my day out in nature, no matter how cold it is, and being able to connect and allow my mind to race and then also just calm down. So that's one thing. But I've also learned the fact that I can't just depend on one mode of care to do everything. And so I've added journaling, and I've added therapy. I've added--and also really something that I lost over COVID that I really tried to regain is that connection with people, and especially people are in similar work in similar circumstances. And that importance to be able to be connected with folks has been--It's really important to me.

Dr. Angela Ward: I do all kinds of stuff. One thing is dance and laugh and play music. I love music. I love love, love, love, love music. And I would say, too, that I exercise, I've done a better job of making sure that each day I at least go to a body toning class or pilates just to give my body some space and some time. And I realize how much better my body feels when I'm able to, even if I don't get to the gym, I stretch. I was on the road last week and I'm like, "I'm not going to, no workout, nothing." But I laid down, I stretched, I made sure I got all of those pieces moving because your body, your joints need oxygen. And by stretching, I'm giving them oxygen. And that oxygen then goes to my brain and helps me think clearer and helps me...

Dr. Angela Ward: So you don't have to have a gym membership, you can just stretch and do that by yourself. And then I also get my hair done, I get my nails done, and I do my own nails. I get some little stuff at HEB that makes them hard, so they look pretty because I don't have the money to go to the beauty shop. But looking good is important to me and feeling good is important to me. So if I look good, I feel good. What Dion saying? (women laugh) We don't want to have to pay Dion? But so massage also. Just whatever I can do to keep my aging body moving. And I'm a basketball mama, so I spend a lot of time watching my boys play basketball, so that fuels me as well.

Ike Evans: Okay. Lastly, if there's anything that y'all would like to plug or just to make our listeners aware of, this is your opportunity.

Dr. Mary Rice-B...: Well, first of all, I guess I would plug that I just recently published a book which also highlights--Dr. Angela Ward is part of that book. So "Leading Within Systems of Inequity in Education: A Liberation Guide for Leaders of Color." It's

on Amazon, Bookshop, any place. And then I also work at a nonprofit organization, the Leadership Academy. And so if you are a person who works with a district or is in a district and you're looking to support your leadership development, we are here to support you.

Dr. Angela Ward: And I'm also a consulting faculty with the Leadership Academy, so you might get to work with both of us if you go to Dr. Mary's nonprofit organization that she works for. And for me, I am in the process of writing a book and my goal is to get it done by December. And so it is focused on anti-racism in regards to professional learning. And the working title is "With Love, Humanizing Anti-Racist Professional Learning". And to follow me, you can go to my website ToWardEquity.com and start following me on LinkedIn, Dr. Angela Ward, or Instagram and Threads. Two, the number two, my last name, Ward, Equity, you can find me there.

Ike Evans: Alright, Angela, Mary, thank you so much for taking the time. We really do appreciate it and best of luck with everything.

Dr. Mary Rice-B...: Thank you.

Dr. Angela Ward: Thank you.

Ike Evans: All that background buzz that you were hearing during the interview shows what kind of vibe we were going for that day. The setting was northeast early-college high school in northeast Austin. We didn't just want a day of heavy and somber reflection, but also fun and fellowship and yes, giving people the chance to dance and to move their bodies. It was in that spirit that toward the end of the day, spoken-word artist Joe Anderson, Jr., dropped some verses that once again gave people something to think about while fitting the vibe of the day. Have a listen.

Joe Anderson, J...: Dear lost little Black boy, you are not a freak. You're not an experiment. You're not a deviant. You're not different. You are amazing. I wish, though, that you won't have to deal with the world, but the terrible truth is, there are people who will not like you. Matter of fact, they'll hate you and won't even know you. And I apologize for what you will encounter. I apologize for the boys who will talk about you every day when you're in school. I'm sorry for the future fights you will have with trying to fend off everyone. They are the ones that are lost. Lost little Black boy, know your value. Realize that you are important and so many people love you. I hate that it takes you so long to truly believe this, but it's true. This time, it will get so much better, and the links that you received from classmates will be replaced by love. I wish I could show you the constellation that will guide you through this time, but realize it only builds character.

Joe Anderson, J...: Lost little Black boy, you are amazing, and never change, because people will change because of you. Lost little Black boy, you are here for a purpose, and

that's to transform lives. You'll have the guts to do something that most can only dream of, and that's to be out and proud. The struggle that you go through will build character and will build a strength to be the voice of an entire generation. You'll never know how many lives you may have saved by doing that. Lost little Black boy, never be afraid of your potential, and realize the only difference between fear and courage is action. Never make yourself feel small to satisfy others. Lost little Black boy, love hard. And even if some don't like it, others will love and appreciate you for it. Lost little Black boy, follow your heart. Chase your dreams. Love as if you've never been talked about, bullied, beaten up, hurt, pained, sexually abused, discriminated against, or taken advantage of. Lost little Black boy, be the change you want to see in the world. Never settle, and keep your standards high. Lost little Black boy, remember, I love you. I just wish. I just wish. I just wish that this time, you love yourself.

Joe Anderson, J...: Thank y'all so much. I appreciate it.

Ike Evans: Before we take it home, I thought I'd give one final shout-out to our friends at Austin Justice Coalition, in particular, their executive director, Chas Moore, and Program Administrator Jay McCullar, who we worked with closely in putting this event together. Hats off to both of them, and I encourage everyone who's interested to check out AustinJustice.org to see what else this terrific organization has in store.

Ike Evans: So, where does that leave us? Well, I don't think it's going out on a limb to predict that 2024 is going to be a year that tests us emotionally. Not only is it an election year, but it is also the first year that the state of Texas's ban on DEI programs in higher education goes into effect. As of this recording, it is still January, and there is no telling what this moment will look like when we get to December and look back on it.

Ike Evans: But it is still worth celebrating that on this one day in January, a group of people were able to bear the cold and find each other. I think that seeking and finding community under less-than-ideal circumstances is going to loom as a theme for this year and for the foreseeable future. We hope that you enjoyed this episode. You can find related resources for this conversation in the episode description. Please leave us a review and subscribe to us on iTunes, Apple Podcasts, Google Podcasts, TuneIn, Spotify, or wherever you get your podcasts. Production assistance by Anna Harris, Kate Rooney, and Daryl Wiggins. And thanks as always to the Hogg Foundation for its support. Just as taking care of ourselves helps us in being there for others, so it is as well that showing up for others helps us strengthen our own resilience. Taking us out now is "Anna's Good Vibes" by my good friend Anna Harris. Thanks for joining us.

♪ [music] ♪:

♪ [Anna's Good Vibes 00:35:27] ♪