



ANTIRACISM LITERACY PARTNERS A NEXT RIGHT ACTION

“1619” Discussion Guide

General Discussion Guidelines

1. What is racism and antiracism? To begin your discussion, start with the same understanding of these terms. See “Being Antiracist” on p. 4 of this reading guide.
2. Keep in mind that racism exists whether people are aware of it or not. A racial identification as white and privileged or as a person of color will affect our ability to see racism.
3. Speak to your own thoughts, behaviors, feelings, experience, and beliefs. Refrain from hopelessness and absolutes such as “Racism is never going to end,” or “I can’t do anything.”
4. Expect discomfort but avoid defensiveness. There is a difference between agreement and understanding; consider whether “I don’t agree” may actually mean “I don’t understand.”
5. Consider how your antiracism work furthers the values, mission, and ends of Unity Church-Unitarian; see on p. 5.
6. This guide is meant only to serve as a conversation starter. Feel free to create a format that works best for you, and create and discuss topics and questions as you think best.

Covenants

We will listen from the heart.

We will speak honestly from the heart about our own experience, not that of others.

We will respect the confidentiality of what is shared here.

We will not interrupt.

We will not give unasked-for advice.

We will not judge others by what they say.

We will honor the diversity of thoughts and feelings.

We will honor and respect our time together and our commitment to our learning partner.

Suggested 1-hour Discussion Format

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|--------|---|
| 5 min | Opening: Review of covenants |
| 10 min | <i>Check-in.</i> What, briefly, is going on in your life today? |
| 30 min | Discussion |
| 10 min | <i>Check-out.</i> How are you feeling now? |
| 5 min | Next discussion: where, when, scheduled on Zoom? |

“1619” Discussion Guide

Link to the podcasts on the NYT website: <https://www.nytimes.com/column/1619-project>

Also available: [Via Apple Podcasts](#) / [Via RadioPublic](#) / [Via Stitcher](#)

There is a link on each of the episodes pages on the NYT website to a transcript of the episode.

About

“Why We Published The 1619 Project” by Jake Silverstein.

The New York Times Magazine, Dec 20, 2019.

1619 is not a year that most Americans know as a notable date in our country’s history. Those who do are at most a tiny fraction of those who can tell you that 1776 is the year of our nation’s birth. What if, however, we were to tell you that the moment that the country’s defining contradictions first came into the world was in late August of 1619? That was when a ship arrived at Point Comfort in the British colony of Virginia, bearing a cargo of 20 to 30 enslaved Africans. Their arrival inaugurated a barbaric system of chattel slavery that would last for the next 250 years. This is sometimes referred to as the country’s original sin, but it is more than that: It is the country’s very origin.

Out of slavery — and the anti-black racism it required — grew nearly everything that has truly made America exceptional: its economic might, its industrial power, its electoral system, its diet and popular music, the inequities of its public health and education, its astonishing penchant for violence, its income inequality, the example it sets for the world as a land of freedom and equality, its slang, its legal system and the endemic racial fears and hatreds that continue to plague it to this day. The seeds of all that were planted long before our official birth date, in 1776, when the men known as our founders formally declared independence from Britain.

The goal of The 1619 Project is to reframe American history by considering what it would mean to regard 1619 as our nation’s birth year. Doing so requires us to place the consequences of slavery and the contributions of black Americans at the very center of the story we tell ourselves about who we are as a country.

- Introducing ‘1619’
Aug. 17, 2019, 00:04:42
- Episode 1: The Fight for a True Democracy
Aug. 23, 2019, 00:43:31
- Episode 2: The Economy That Slavery Built
Aug. 31, 2019, 00:32:55
- Episode 3: The Birth of American Music
Sept. 6, 2019, 00:35:28
- Episode 4: How the Bad Blood Started
Sept. 14, 2019, 00:40:12
- Episode 5: The Land of Our Fathers, Part 1
Oct. 5, 2019, 00:30:17
- Episode 5: The Land of Our Fathers, Part 2
Oct. 12, 2019, 00:37:39

Discussion Questions

Questions to Consider Before Exploring *The 1619 Project*:

1. How did you first learn about the history of slavery in the U.S.? What did you learn, and how was that information presented?
2. What do you see as the lasting legacy of slavery in the U.S.?
3. What do you know about the contributions of black Americans to U.S. society, and where does that information come from?
4. Referring to the text of the Declaration of Independence, answer the following questions:
 - What are the values stated in the Declaration of Independence?
 - In what ways can you see those values working in contemporary American life? In what ways can you see them failing?
 - How has the interpretation of those values changed over time? Who is responsible for creating those changes?

Episode 1: The Fight for a True Democracy

1. How have laws, policies, and systems developed to enforce the enslavement of black Americans before the Civil War influenced laws, policies, and systems in years since?
2. How has activism by black Americans throughout U.S. history led to policies that benefit all people living in the U.S.?
3. How do you feel about the incongruity shown in stories about our founding fathers, such as the one about enslaved people owned by Thomas Jefferson's while he's writing the famous words, "all men are created equal"?

Episode 2: The Economy That Slavery Built

1. How was the expansion of the U.S. shaped and made possible by slave labor?
2. How much were you aware of the investments pre-civil war banks were making in enslaved people?
3. What impacts did slavery have on financial systems, both in this country, and across the globe?

Episode 3: The Birth of American Music

1. How has popular music throughout history used traditions and styles developed by black Americans?
2. How does the podcast describe black music and blackness in music? What's the difference?

Episode 4: How the Bad Blood Started

1. How have healthcare policies, city planning, and other government systems in the U.S. limited who has access to healthcare services?
2. According to the podcast, what factors help diseases spread in a community?
3. How have racist medical practices and attitudes influenced the medical treatment that black Americans have received throughout history, and continue to receive today?

Episode 5: The Land of Our Fathers, Part 1 and Part 2

1. The Provosts' problems with getting sufficient crop loans began with a new bank, just at the cusp of the 2008 recession. You can read all about the pending lawsuit with the bank on the web. How do you feel about the accusation that the bank was discriminatory against the Provosts?

2. Compare the situation the bank put the Provosts in with the common practices of White landowners and their Black sharecroppers after the Civil War. And with the broken promise of 40 acres and a mule.
3. Here are some statistics to consider ...
 - US census of agriculture statistics show a 44.7% decrease in black farm operators in Iberia parish – where the Provosts live – between 2007 and 2012, compared with a 12.3% decrease in white farm operators.
 - In neighboring Vermillion parish, where June farmed the majority of his sugarcane, black farm operators decreased by 17% between 2002 and 2012, while white farmers increased by 6%.
 - Nationally, less than 2% of farmers are black.
 - June Provost has kept a neatly printed list of Black sugarcane farmers in his area. In 1983, there were approximately 60. By 2000, that number had dwindled to 17. Today, June and Angie count only four.
4. Several historians have questioned the framing or interpretation of slavery and racism, and the origin of Black history in the 1619 Project. What do you think about the opinions of Gregory Carr, outlined here:

Professor of Africana Studies at Howard University, Gregory Carr, rightly highlights that the Project's 1619 origin story for Black history shapes what is asked, investigated, and learned. On Twitter, Carr quoted historian John Henrik Clarke: "If you start your history with slavery, everything since then seems like progress."

In a recent [WAMU podcast on the effect of the 1619 Project on how slavery is taught in the classroom](#), Carr elaborated some of the limitations he sees in both the point of departure and the scope of the 1619 Project. He said:

It isn't necessarily revolutionary to move from say 1776 to 1619. It still centers the kind of English presence in North America, when we know, of course, that Africans had been brought to North America as enslaved people by the Spanish over a century before. And I think that there's a bit of a sensationalist turn when you say you're rewriting the history of America when in fact you're reinscribing for me a very troubling and problematic framework. And that troubling and problematic framework really I can reduce it down to a word, citizenship. What does it mean to have a contemporary society where to be a citizen makes you more human than people who aren't? This idea, for example, that the enslaved Africans would look forward to a day when they would become citizens was really absurd if you just look at history.

When you say, for example, that these contemporary us, these contemporary African people in this country are our ancestors wildest dreams, well, all you have to do, a quick glance through history will show that, no, their wildest dreams were to escape. More Africans fought for the British or ran away than fought for George Washington's army, for example. Their wildest dreams were to return to Africa for those first generations. Their wildest dreams were to be left alone.

So the 1619 Project is important in certainly having us have these conversations. But it is by no means at the center of or in any way really superior to the work that had been done by Black and brown journalists, writers, historians. Go back and look at any ten-year period in *Ebony Magazine* from its founding up through recently, you'll see its better in some ways, more insightful and certainly differently framed curriculum work. And that's just been going on incessantly. And what I've learned in terms of curriculum over the last 25-30 years of teaching and curriculum writing is the right answers rarely exist. But the right questions can always be asked. And I don't think the 1619 Project asks right enough questions.

From Zinn Education Project, "Teaching with New York Times 1619 Project."
December 8, 2019. <https://www.zinnedproject.org/news/teaching-1619-project/>

Questions to Consider After Exploring *The 1619 Project*:

1. What lines/images/moments stuck out to you, and why?
2. What surprised you? What do you want to know more about?
3. How do the stories presented in *The 1619 Project* compare to the stories you grew up hearing about the origins of slavery and its modern day impacts?
4. How does the origin story of the U.S. change if we mark the beginning of U.S. history in 1619 instead of 1776?
5. What is national memory? How do we create it? How can we change it?

Our Next Right Action: Unity Church began exploring Our Next Right Action shortly after the killing of George Floyd. "Antiracism Literacy Partners" is one of several "next right actions." Further education, advocacy, and lifestyle changes that shift our awareness and privilege are part of how we can sustain antiracism as a lifelong commitment. What next right actions might you take?

For More Information

- The 1619 Project began with the publication, in August 2019, of a special issue of The New York Times Magazine containing essays on different aspects of contemporary American life, from mass incarceration to rush-hour traffic, that have their roots in slavery and its aftermath. Each essay takes up a modern phenomenon, familiar to all, and reveals its history. Find the links to each of the twelve essays here:
<https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/12/20/magazine/1619-intro.html>
- "The Fight Over the 1619 Project Is Not About the Facts" by Adam Serwer. The Atlantic. December 23, 2019. <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2019/12/historians-clash-1619-project/604093/>

Note

- "Questions to Consider..." before and after from: Pulitzer Center, "The 1619 Project Curriculum" <https://pulitzercenter.org/builder/lesson/reading-guide-quotes-key-terms-and-questions-26504>
- Questions for each episode from: The First Unitarian Universalist Church of Nashville, "1619 Project Podcast Discussions." <https://www.firstuunash.org/1619-project-podcast/>

From “Talking About Race,” National Museum of African American History & Culture: Being Antiracist

To create an equal society, we must commit to making unbiased choices and being antiracist in all aspects of our lives.

Race does not biologically exist, yet how we identify with race is so powerful, it influences our experiences and shapes our lives. In a society that privileges white people and whiteness, racist ideas are considered normal throughout our media, culture, social systems, and institutions. Historically, racist views justified the unfair treatment and oppression of people of color (including enslavement, segregation, internment, etc.). We can be led to believe that racism is only about individual mindsets and actions, yet racist policies also contribute to our polarization. While individual choices are damaging, racist ideas in policy have a wide-spread impact by threatening the equity of our systems and the fairness of our institutions. To create an equal society, we must commit to making unbiased choices and being antiracist in all aspects of our lives.

Being antiracist is fighting against racism. Racism takes several forms and works most often in tandem with at least one other form to reinforce racist ideas, behavior, and policy. Types of racism are:

- **Individual racism** refers to the beliefs, attitudes, and actions of individuals that support or perpetuate racism in conscious and unconscious ways. The U.S. cultural narrative about racism typically focuses on individual racism and fails to recognize systemic racism. *Examples include believing in the superiority of white people, not hiring a person of color because “something doesn’t feel right,” or telling a racist joke.*
- **Interpersonal racism** occurs between individuals. These are public expressions of racism, often involving slurs, biases, or hateful words or actions.
- **Institutional racism** occurs in an organization. These are discriminatory treatments, unfair policies, or biased practices based on race that result in inequitable outcomes for whites over people of color and extend considerably beyond prejudice. These institutional policies often never mention any racial group, but the intent is to create advantages. *Example: A school system where students of color are more frequently distributed into the most crowded classrooms and underfunded schools and out of the higher-resourced schools.*
- **Structural racism** is the overarching system of racial bias across institutions and society. These systems give privileges to white people resulting in disadvantages to people of color. *Example: Stereotypes of people of color as criminals in mainstream movies and media.*

No one is born racist or antiracist; these result from the choices we make. Being antiracist results from a conscious decision to make frequent, consistent, equitable choices daily. These choices require ongoing self-awareness and self-reflection as we move through life. In the absence of making antiracist choices, we (un)consciously uphold aspects of white supremacy, white-dominant culture, and unequal institutions and society. Being racist or antiracist is not about who you *are*; it is about what you *do*.

Being Antiracist at the Individual and Interpersonal Level

When we choose to be antiracist, we become actively conscious about race and racism *and* take actions to end racial inequities in our daily lives. Being antiracist is believing that racism is everyone’s problem, and we all have a role to play in stopping it. In “[The Racial Healing Handbook](#),” Dr. Anneliese

A. Singh reminds us of the importance of being purposeful: “You need the intentional mindset of *Yep, this racism thing is everyone’s problem-including mine, and I’m going to do something about it.*”

Being antiracist is different for white people than it is for people of color. For white people, being antiracist evolves with their racial identity development. They must acknowledge and understand their privilege, work to change their internalized racism, and interrupt racism when they see it. For people of color, it means recognizing how race and racism have been internalized, and whether it has been applied to other people of color.

All racial groups struggle under white supremacy. People of color groups are not always united in solidarity. People of color can act by challenging internalized white supremacy and interrupting patterns of prejudice against other racial groups. For everyone, it is an ongoing practice and process.

Accessed Sept 1, 2020: <https://nmaahc.si.edu/learn/talking-about-race/topics/being-antiracist>

Unity Church-Unitarian Values, Mission, and Ends

Values

Unity Church-Unitarian honors the ambiguity and uncertainty in the search for greater truth, meaning, and equity. In all we do, we strive to embody:

- Wonder
- Open-hearted engagement
- Courageous action

Mission

Unity Church-Unitarian fosters transformation through a free and inclusive religious community that encourages lives of integrity, service, and joy.

Ends Statements 2018-2023

Working within ourselves, among our church community, and beyond in the larger world, we the people of Unity Church-Unitarian:

- Create a multicultural spiritual home built on authentic relationships.
- Ground ourselves in personal practice and communal worship that grows our capacity for wonder and spiritual deepening.
- Articulate our Unitarian Universalist faith identity, teach it to our children, share it with others, and live it courageously in the world.
- Know each other in all our fullness and create an ever-widening circle of belonging for all people.
- Generously give and openly receive compassionate care in times of joy, sorrow, and transition.
- Discover and pursue our individual and collective work to advance justice, wholeness, and equity for people, our Earth, and all life on it.
- Create brave space for racial healing and dismantling dominant culture.
- Sustain and steward the church and our larger Unitarian Universalist movement for the future.

Accessed 8.29.20: <https://www.unityunitarian.org/values-mission-ends.html>

Covenants adapted from UU Small Group Ministry Network, accessed 8.29.20:

<http://www.smallgroupministry.net/public/covenants.html>