

Discussion & Review Questions

1. Towards the beginning of the video, after sharing the thesis that the authors of the 1619 Project present in their writing, Professor Reilly explains that, “To them, everything that’s wrong with America is tied to her ‘original’ sin of slavery: from segregation to traffic jams (yes, traffic jams). For the 1619 Project authors, racism is not a part of the American experience- it is the American experience.” What do you think the authors of the 1619 Project hoped to accomplish with their publication? Do you agree with the Project 1619 authors that everything wrong with America is directly or indirectly tied to slavery and racism? Why or why not?
2. Later in the video, Professor Reilly debunks the 1610 Project authors’ claim that slavery made America rich by reminding us of this important distinction: “Slavery made some Americans rich, true enough. Eli Yale, for example, made a fortune in the slave trade. He donated money and land for the university that is named after him. But the institution of slavery didn’t make America rich. In fact, the slave system badly slowed the economic development of half the country.” Why is the distinction between some individuals acquiring wealth through the slave industry and the U.S. becoming a wealthy nation due to other, non-slave-related industries such an important distinction to acknowledge when discussing slavery and racism in America? Explain. In what ways, specifically, do you think the slave system actually slowed economic development in the rural South of America during that time? Explain.
3. Professor Reilly goes on to characterize the 1619 Project claim that ‘racism is an unchangeable part of America’ as, “... pernicious because it suggests that the United States is an inherently racist country that can’t overcome its flaws. Yet that’s exactly what it’s done. Today, America is the most successful multi-racial country in history; the only white majority country to elect a black President- twice. Of course progress has not always been smooth. There have been terrible setbacks. But to compare American attitudes about race today to America a hundred years ago, let alone to 1619, is absurd.” Do you agree with the 1619 authors that America can’t ever overcome its racism? Why or why not? Why do you think that claiming America’s current attitudes towards race is comparable to its past attitudes towards race is laughably invalid? Explain.
4. Towards the end of the video, Professor Reilly points out that, “The great black leaders of the past, Harriet Tubman, Frederick Douglass, Booker T Washington, Martin Luther King never lost faith in America’s promise- that all people are created equal. None of them believed that racism was America’s defining characteristic.” Why do you think that despite such horrible racism being tolerated in mainstream American culture during their time, none of these black leaders thought that racism was America’s defining characteristic? Explain. Considering this fact, why do you think that some people in current times *do* actually believe that racism is the defining characteristic of America? Explain.
5. At the end of the video, Professor Reilly notes that, “Shortly after the 1619 Project was published, a group of distinguished historians, almost all on the Left, wrote a public letter condemning the work. They called it a ‘displacement of historical understanding by ideology.’” Why do you think that so many historians condemned the work? What do you think ‘displacement of historical understanding by ideology’ means? Explain.

Extend the Learning:

Case Study Generation Z

INSTRUCTIONS: Read the article “Gen Z Leads Fight For Social Change,” then answer the questions that follow.

1. What did protesters in the article take to the streets to demand? Who is leading many of the major protests, and how are they being organized? What are groups of young adults doing in city after city? Who are Tiana Day and Mimi Zoila, and what did they do? What did the six teens in Nashville do? What are many teens doing on the TikTok platform to fight racism? What are users of online platforms demanding of their friends, fans, and followers? Where is Gen Z positioned in the fight for social justice?
2. In what ways does this article prove the premises of the 1619 Project to be wrong? Explain. Do you think that social media is the best tool for Americans to combat racism? If so, why? If not, what do you think would be better for fighting against racism? Do you think that it is possible for America, and indeed the world, to someday be free of racism completely? Why or why not?
3. Many Americans alive today fail to grasp the big picture of what slavery in early America was really like- for instance that most people, especially in the South could not afford slaves and didn't own them. Only a small percentage of wealthy people in the South owned a vast majority of the slaves. Besides ignorance of basic facts such as this, why do you think that many Americans alive today tend to have such a skewed, inaccurate idea of what slavery was like and indeed what real American history is? Do you think that Gen Z truly needs to know history in order to continue leading America towards a future that has eradicated racism? Why or why not? In what way is being racist anti-American? Explain.

Commentary

Gen Z Leads Fight For Social Change

by [Aaron Paquette](#) , Columnist, June 11, 2020

For the last two weeks, protesters have taken to the streets in nearly every major American city to demand racial equality and social justice, following the tragic death of George Floyd under the knee of a Minneapolis cop. And remarkably, Gen Z is leading many of these protests, using social media as an organizing tool.

In city after city, groups of young adults are connecting online or at school, and mobilizing thousands of people. The *Christian Science Monitor* reports that Jacqueline LaBayne and Kerrigan Williams, two grad students in their early 20s who had never met in person, founded Freedom Fighters DC within hours of Floyd's death. Their movement now boasts over 10,000 followers on Twitter and nearly 23,000 on Instagram, and brought hundreds of young marchers to Washington, D.C.

In San Francisco, ABC 7 reports that 19-year-olds Tiana Day and Mimi Zoila met online and organized a peaceful protest on the Golden Gate Bridge that drew thousands of participants. In Michigan, the *Detroit Free Press* documents how Chippewa Valley High School students Mary Vucaj, Angel Santana and Ariana Belyue organized a march into Sterling Heights that appeared to draw a thousand people.

In Nashville, *The Hill* profiles how six teens—Mikayla Smith, Jade Fuller, Nya Collins, Zee Thomas, Kennedy Green and Emma Rose Smith—met online, and organized a Black Lives Matter protest that drew somewhere between 10,000-20,000 participants. And in Orange County, California, the *Daily Pilot* reports that a group of 12 young people of color founded MEEP Shows (“More Empowering Events Please”) last summer and organized a protest in Santa Ana that drew hundreds, and another in Garden Grove that drew thousands.

Even teens who can't organize or join protests are finding ways to fight injustice. *Insider* reports that many teens are taking to TikTok to post videos in support of Black Lives Matter, and calling out their parents' racist views. Izabella, a 15-year-old TikTok user, went viral with such a video, drawing 1.5 million views on TikTok, and more on Twitter thanks to a repost and reply from cultural critic Safy-Hallan Farah.

What can brands learn from these young activists?

***Online platforms produce real-life action.** There's a misperception that human connections forged on Twitter, Snap or YouTube stay in the virtual realm, and never become real-life meet-

ups or activities. This summer's protests prove that when the stakes are high enough, and people have good reason to gather, thousands will immediately "answer the call."

***Any platform can amplify social change.** Until a few weeks ago, TikTok was seen as a place for silly music videos. Now, it's an essential megaphone to promote social change, and document in real time the heartbreaks that activists navigate along the way. Millions of Instagrammers observed Blackout Tuesday, and users of Twitch, Tinder and other platforms might be close behind. Look for users to demand that their friends, fans and followers not just be "non-racist," but actively "anti-racist."

***Women are rising up to protect their sons, brothers and themselves.** According to author Brittney Cooper in *Time*, black women who lose their lives to police violence (such as Breonna Taylor) tend to remain invisible. Meanwhile, it's often black women who bear witness to the tragic deaths of black men, including 17-year-old Darnella Frazier, who filmed George Floyd's death, and Rachel Jeantel, who listened to Trayvon Martin's fatal assault during a phone call. It's telling that young women organized all of the protests described above, and have found a way both to bear witness and effect change.

In the fight for racial justice, Gen Z isn't just on the front lines. it's leading the way.



QUIZ

What's Wrong With The 1619 Project?

- 1. According to The 1619 Project, everything that's wrong with America is tied to _____.**
 - a. the economic greed of Wall Street
 - b. religious zealotry
 - c. America's 'original' sin of slavery
 - d. the Republican Party

- 2. If you asked the Founders why they no longer wanted to be a British Colony, what would some of their answers be?**
 - a. taxation without representation was unacceptable
 - b. the Stamp Act
 - c. the desire to be free, to chart their own destiny as a sovereign nation
 - d. all of the above

- 3. Britain didn't free the slaves in its overseas colonies until 1833- 57 years later after the Declaration of Independence.**
 - a. True
 - b. False

- 4. In the American Civil War, 360,000 Union soldiers died in order to free how many slaves?**
 - a. one million
 - b. two million
 - c. three million
 - d. four million

- 5. In the last 50 years, _____ black Africans have come to America as legal immigrants because they know that America holds opportunity for everyone.**
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