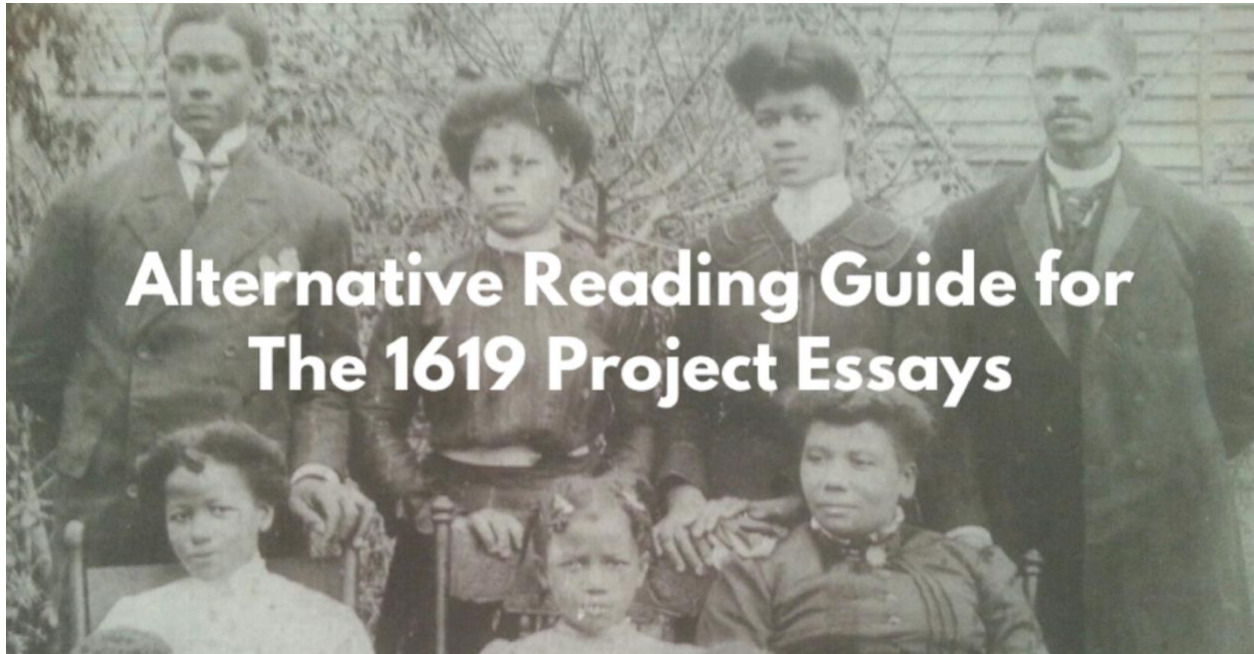


Alternative Reading Guide for The 1619 Project Essays ©2022



Below are essays from the New York Times 1619 Project and a [Pulitzer Center](#) designed [reading guide](#) along with a supplemental reading guide and questions. You can find the 1619 essays below in the [full issue](#) from the Pulitzer Center.

The 1619 Project, while being accused of some historically [fallacious claims](#), created a groundswell of conversation in the United States. In fact, the response was so monumental that many schools began to use the 1619 Project in their curriculum. This adds a necessary richness to American classrooms where too often the voices and experiences of black Americans, who were instrumental in helping to shape and define America's place in history, have often been downplayed or even ignored. We welcome the new discussion and hope that it continues. The danger we see in using only the 1619 Project as a guide to race relations and black American history is that it drowns out some of the voices of black resilience, strength and true heroism. Much of the 1619 Project focuses on oppression and grievance as the collective voice of the black American experience. This alternative reading guide takes the Pulitzer Center's guide and adds an additional reading to each 1619 Project essay for a more complete picture of the black American experience and contribution to American society. We encourage all classrooms using the 1619 Project to consider adding these or other supplemental readings to expand their curriculum, promote robust dialogue and discussion, and add further dimension to the nuance and complexity of the building of America.

To the coming of a better time,

W.F. Twyman, Jr. & J. Richmond

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Appendix A

Appendix B

Alternative Reading Guide for the 1619 Project Essays

1. “The Idea of America” by Nikole Hannah-Jones (pages 14–26)

Excerpt: “Our Declaration of Independence, signed on July 4, 1776, proclaims that ‘all men are created equal’ and ‘endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights.’ But the white men who drafted those words did not believe them to be true for the hundreds of thousands of black people in their midst. ‘Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness’ did not apply to fully one-fifth of the country. Yet despite being violently denied the freedom and justice promised to all, black Americans believed fervently in the American creed. Through centuries of black resistance and protest, we have helped the country to live up to its founding ideals...Without the idealistic, strenuous and patriotic efforts of black Americans, our democracy today would most likely look very different — it might not be a democracy at all.”

Key Names, Dates and Terms: abolitionist, American Revolution, Civil Rights Act, Crispus Attucks, Declaration of Independence, Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, Jim Crow, Mason-Dixon Line, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (N.A.A.C.P.), Reconstruction, W.E.B. Du Bois

Guiding Questions:

- 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?
- How has activism by black Americans throughout U.S. history led to policies that benefit all people living in the U.S.?

Alternative:

“The American Soviet Mentality: Collective Demonization Invades Our Culture” by Izabella Tabarovsky, published in Tablet Magazine, June 15, 2020

Excerpt: “All of us who came out of the Soviet system bear the scars of the practice of unanimous condemnation, whether we ourselves had been targets or participants in it or not. It is partly why Soviet immigrants are often so averse to any expressions of collectivism: We have seen its ugliest expressions in our own lives and our friends’ and families’ lives. It is impossible to read the chastising remarks of Soviet writers, for whom (Boris) Pasternak had been a friend and mentor, without a sense of deep shame. Shame over the perfidy and lack of decency on display. Shame at the misrepresentations and perversions of truth. Shame at the virtue signaling and the closing of rank. Shame over the momentary and, we now know, fleeting triumph of mediocrity over truth.”

Key Names, Dates and Terms: Soviet, Soviet mentality, unanimous condemnation, collective demonization, collectivism, shame, misrepresentation, perversions of truth, virtue signaling, mediocrity

Guiding Questions:

- How has collectivist demonization in black American culture and consciousness since the Civil Rights Movement influenced black enterprise, achievement and personal agency in years since?
- What has been the impact of black enterprise on American history?

Explanation: The Idea of America & The American Soviet Mentality

As one reads the 1619 Project, one is struck by the accusatory tone, a judgmental gaze upon the land and ideas of the Founding Fathers. It is as if all falls away over the centuries and only collective demonization matters. Jefferson and Washington, Adams and Franklin, reduced to caricatures of race and sex. The universal is transcendent. The tribal transcends nothing. And so, what better rejoinder to the centerpiece essay of the 1619 Project than the words of a Soviet immigrant who can see the blessings of liberty with fresh eyes, who knows the scars of “collective demonization of prominent cultural figures,” and who offers us not accusation but a cautionary tone, an introspective gaze upon the depths of collective hounding and the greatness of the human condition.

2. “Chained Migration” by Tiya Miles (page 22)

Excerpt: “Slavery leapt out of the East and into the interior lands of the Old Southwest in the 1820s and 1830s.”

“As new lands in the Old Southwest were pried open, white enslavers back east realized their most profitable export was no longer tobacco or rice. A complex interstate slave trade became an industry of its own. This extractive system, together with enslavers moving west with human property, resulted in the relocation of approximately one million enslaved black people to a new region. The entrenched practice of buying, selling, owning, renting and mortgaging humans stretched into the American West along with the white settler-colonial population that now occupied former indigenous lands.”

Key Names, Dates and Terms: Indian Removal Act of 1830, Mexican-American War, westward expansion

Guiding Questions:

- How was the expansion of the U.S. shaped and made possible by slave labor?
- When did free black Americans begin to travel west, and why?

Alternative:

“From the Virginia Plantation to the National Capitol” by John Mercer Langston (esp. pgs. 31-33, *found in link*)

Excerpt: “And now, early upon a bright and beautiful October morning in 1834, just as the dawn touched the eastern sky, these inexperienced wayfarers, at the time appointed, quitted the old plantation upon a journey which should prove to them all a new revelation.”

“The night was well spent, the moon had reached well-nigh its setting, before he had finished his interesting conversation to the tired travelers – old friends in fact of his, who composed his auditors. He told much of his home in Ohio: how he lived, and what he did there; how he was treated by all classes; when he left home, and what his experiences had been as he journeyed along southward to meet those who were now made so happy by his presence and his prospective assistance. He had left the town in Ohio, to which these friends from and relatives of his (from Louisa County, Virginia) were wending their way, upon the same day, as he supposed, that they had left Louisa Court House; and had expected to meet them sooner; and, if possible, so near their starting-point, as to make it practicable for him to hurry on even so far; spend there at least one day, and pressing his horse and himself in his return, overtake them within fifty miles, certainly, westward of the spot where this agreeable meeting occurred. Now, however, he concluded to go no further; but remaining at once, direct and guide those who must travel the road over which he had just passed.”

Key Names, Dates and Terms: Self-reliance, success, heroic achievement

Guiding Questions:

- How was the expansion of the U.S. shaped and made possible by free black culture and consciousness?
- Does this Langston essay provide alternative ideas to Chained Migration?

Explanation: Chained Migration & From the Virginia Plantation to the National Capitol

The 1619 Project essay, Chained Migration asserts, “*Enslaved men who had served in the Union Army were among the first wave of African-Americans to move west of their own free will.*” But, this falsehood, erases the tales and agency of a number of black Americans. Tell this tale to Madison Hemings, a free black man who moved of his own free will from Charlottesville, Virginia to Pike County, Ohio in 1836. Tell this distortion of the truth to Mifflin W. Gibbs who moved from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania out to California in 1850 as part of the Gold Rush. Tell this myth to the father of Richard T. Greener, a sailor from the East Coast who sought gold in California. How about the country’s first black millionaire, William Alexander Leidesdorff, son of a Danish sailor and a Caribbean woman? Leidesdorff built his fortune in the 1840s in the import-export trade and lived of his own free will in San Francisco, California. The reality is free black families like Nelson & Ellenor (Eggleston) Piles were choosing of their own free will to move from Amelia County, Virginia to Chillicothe, Ross County, Ohio during the 1815–1818 time period. Why? Because they chose to migrate for better opportunities for their children and grandchildren. One way to halt the falsehoods is to present the truth of free black migration from Virginia to the West, while also acknowledging the hardships presented in the 1619 essay. And so, we offer *From the Virginia Plantation to the National Capitol* by John Mercer Langston (1829–1897) as the alternative essay.

One day in 1833, a four-year-old son was orphaned in Louisa County, Virginia. The boy’s father had carefully and thoughtfully made provisions for a guardian and a trust fund. Virginia was a slave state and the young orphan in grief was a free black. Arrangements were made for the four-year-old and his two older brothers to leave the father’s plantation and head west for a better life in Ohio across the Appalachian Mountains. *From the Virginia Plantation to the National Capitol* shares a story not of chained migration but a father’s foresight for his free black children.

3. “Capitalism” by Matthew Desmond (pages 30–40)

Excerpt: “In the United States, the richest 1 percent of Americans own 40 percent of the country’s wealth, while a larger share of working-age people (18-65) lives in poverty than in any other nation belonging to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (O.E.C.D.).”

“Those searching for reasons the American economy is uniquely severe and unbridled have found answers in many places (religion, politics, culture). But recently, historians have pointed persuasively to the gnatty fields of Georgia and Alabama, to the cotton houses and slave auction blocks, as the birthplace of America’s low-road approach to capitalism.”

Key Names, Dates and Terms: 2008 economic crisis, assets, capitalism, Collateralized Debt Obligations (C.D.O.s), cotton gin, credit, creditor, debts, depreciation, Industrial Revolution, investor, labor union, Louisiana Purchase, mortgage, Organization

Guiding Questions:

- How does the author describe capitalism in the U.S.?
- How did slavery in the U.S. contribute to the development of the global financial industry?
- What current financial systems reflect practices developed to support industries built on the work of enslaved people?

Alternative:

“Titan: The Life of John D. Rockefeller, Sr” by Ron Chernow (esp. pgs. 12, 216, 240-42, 309, 482, 676, see Appendix A)

Excerpt: “Their clothing was old and tattered, and they looked dirty and hungry” (testimony of childhood squalor of John D. Rockefeller, Sr.)

“The fiercest robber baron had turned out to be the foremost philanthropist...By the time Rockefeller died, in fact, so much good had unexpectedly flowered from so much evil that God might even have greeted him on the other side, as the titan had so confidently expected all along.”

Key Names, Dates and Terms: triumph, American capitalism, robber baron, philanthropist, competitors, reformers, caricaturists, Spelman College

Guiding Questions:

- How does the author describe capitalism in the U.S.?
- How did capitalism in the U.S. contribute to the development of Historically Black Colleges and Universities like Spelman College?
- What current financial systems reflect practices developed to support industries built on the work of black people since 1900?

Explanation: Capitalism & Titan

During the 1970s and in many black American homes, *Black Enterprise Magazine* graced grandma’s living room table for the benefit of grandchildren. How many children of the 1970s were weaned on

stories of *Black Enterprise Magazine* publisher Earl Graves, *Ebony Magazine* and *Jet* publisher John Johnson, telecommunications mogul Percy Sutton, the Parks Sausage family from Baltimore, the man of real estate holdings from Birmingham, Alabama, A.G. Gaston, and the black construction companies in Atlanta?

The essay *Capitalism* seems tone deaf to how much black enterprise (capitalism) has been valued and treasured over the generations in black families. It is no wonder that the most prestigious black women's college in America, Spelman College, honors Mrs. John D. Rockefeller. Sr. Unlike the essay *Capitalism* by Matthew Desmond which sees capitalism through the prism of "gnatty fields of Georgia and Alabama, to the cotton houses and slave auction blocks, as the birthplace of America's low-road approach to capitalism," far more intriguing and provocative is the relationship between great wealth and historically black colleges and universities like Spelman. Did you know that the founders of Spelman College, Harriet E. Giles and Sophia B. Packard, made the pitch to John D. Rockefeller, Sr. that Spelman had a destiny and that Rockefeller's destiny was to fund the nascent black women's college in the early 1880s? The young college teetered on the edge of insolvency until Rockefeller committed his money. In everlasting gratitude, the college named itself Spelman after Mrs. Rockefeller's maiden name. And so, we offer *Titan* as the alternative essay to highlight the beneficial relationship between great wealth and black higher education.