

To edit this guide or use it as a collaborative agenda for your learning circle, click "File" and select "Make a Copy" to duplicate it into your own Google Drive.

- To create a learning circle using this course and P2PU's tools, [start here](#)
- For advice and suggestions on adapting this guide, check out the [Typical Structure](#) section of the [P2PU Knowledge Base](#).

P2PU Facilitator Guide

The 1619 Project

[The 1619 Project](#) is a long-form journalism initiative developed by Nikole Hannah-Jones, writers from The New York Times, and The New York Times Magazine that aims to reframe the history of the United States by placing the consequences of slavery and the contributions of Black Americans at the very center of the national narrative.

This guide provides a structure for navigating these materials as a **learning circle**: a lightly-facilitated peer-based learning group that meets regularly to accomplish a specific learning goal. This document was created using best practices from a community of experienced facilitators and is adapted from The 1619 Project's official [classroom guides](#) and a [facilitation guide](#) created by librarians at Charlotte Mecklenburg Library in Charlotte, NC, USA. Every learning circle is unique, and you are welcome and encouraged to copy or adapt this structure to best fit your (and your participants') needs!

Learning circle duration: 6 weeks, 60 min/meeting

Recommended participant capacity: 12-15 (max 25)

Structure: Readings for homework, group reflection + discussion, addtl. video

Useful links:

- [Examples of learning circle sign-up pages](#)
- [Full PDF version of The 1619 Project](#) + [reading guide](#)
- [Classroom curriculums, guides and activities](#)

Week 1

This agenda is written using recommended timing for each activity, though you can adjust this based on your group's needs. Using a timed agenda can help you stay organized during your meetings while building in flexibility to adjust as needed.

Meeting agenda:

1. Setup and Intros (20 min)
2. Read, Watch, Discuss (30 min)
3. Reflection (10 min)
4. For Next Week

1. Setup and Intros (20 min)

Check-ins at the beginning of each meeting help set the intentions and expectations for the learning circle experience. During this time you can address things from the previous meeting, establish or revisit your group norms, or check in with the group about their willingness to complete homework.

5 min: Setup

- Introduce facilitator(s), the topic, and the learning circle structure:
 - The 1619 Project is an ongoing initiative from The New York Times Magazine that began in August 2019, the 400th anniversary of the beginning of American slavery. It aims to reframe the country's history by placing the consequences of slavery and the contributions of black Americans at the very center of our national narrative.
 - Learning circles are study groups for people who want to take online classes together and in-person. This learning circle will allow participants to read through the essays available through The 1619 Project and discuss the topics related to those essays.
 - I am here to help facilitate this course, and I'll be learning along with you. I am not an expert in this field, I'm looking forward to learning & our discussion.

- If meeting online, review any tools that will be used and identify support options (email, office hours, in-person support at the library, etc) for technical difficulties with patrons

10 min: Introductions

Each participant can share their name and what they're hoping to take away from the course.

Due to the sensitive nature of the topic we strongly recommend discussing group expectations in the first check-in.

5 min: Group Expectations Below are P2PU's recommended group expectations for a new learning circle:

- **Respect the speaker:** When a person is sharing, allow them to share their complete thoughts without interruption. Listen actively and push past distractions from digital devices and your environment when possible.
- **Speak from "I" and eye:** Share from your own experience and perspective. Don't assume the experiences of others and avoid making comments or generalizations about entire communities. Keep your shares focused on what you see, what you notice, and what you feel.
- **Lean into discomfort:** Some topics may be uncomfortable to talk about because of personal experiences or oppressions felt in your everyday life. The emotions and feelings that may arise are normal and can help enhance authentic learning together if shared. Participants are asked to lean into their own discomfort and honor the space for others to do the same.
- **Step up, step back:** A learning circle is most effective when all voices can be heard. If you find yourself speaking often, step back and create space for others to share their ideas. If you're someone who prefers to listen, push yourself to speak out and share at least once per meeting.
- **Keep it confidential:** What happens in the learning circle stays in the learning circle. Respect the privacy of your fellow participants and don't share others' stories without consent.

As a group, note anything that you'd like to add or remove for the list. How do you want to address any conflicts that arise in light of these expectations? (You can return to this list throughout the learning circle).

2. Read, Watch, Discuss (30 min)

Each meeting is structured to begin with a check-in and reviewing an excerpt from the week's assigned readings, then the group will discuss in-depth together. In week 1, you can take this time to review the overall goals of the learning circle and important objectives to keep in mind as you work through the material.

Learning Circle Learning Objectives:

- While working through essays week to week, reflect on the differences between what the history we've been taught and the information presented in the essays
- Consider specific events and those events affect our current circumstances.
- How do societal structures developed to support the enslavement of black people, and the anti-black racism that was cultivated in the U.S. to justify slavery, influence many aspects of modern laws, policies, systems, and culture?
- How have resistance, innovation, and advocacy by black Americans over the course of American history contributed to the nation's wealth and the strengthening of its democracy?

13 min: Watch [MediaStorm's video](#) introducing Nikole Hannah-Jones and The 1619 Project

If you're meeting online, take a minute to discuss as a group whether everyone would prefer to watch videos and navigate readings individually or as a group. If individually: ask everyone to mute their microphones and play the video on their own computer and return at a designated time. (Some may prefer to turn off their video at this time which can be a nice social break too.) If as a group, the facilitator can play the video/show the text and share their screen using the video chat program. Make sure to try this out in advance to make sure the audio works for your participants.

10 min: Read + discuss excerpt: [“The Idea of America” by Nikole Hannah-Jones](#)

“The United States is a nation founded on both an ideal and a lie. Our Declaration of Independence, approved on July 4, 1776, proclaims that “all men are created equal” and “endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable 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 live up to its founding ideals. And not only for ourselves — black rights struggles paved the way for every other rights struggle, including women’s and gay rights, immigrant and disability rights.

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.”

Discussion 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.?

10 min: Read & discuss excerpt: [“Capitalism” by Matthew Desmond](#)

“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.”

Discussion 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?

4. Reflect (10 min)

Reflection time (also referred to as Plus/Deltas) is a great opportunity for the learners to provide feedback. Prompts such as “what went well today” and “share one thing that you would change about this session” can be clarifying for learners and the facilitator(s).

- How did the first meeting go? Take a minute to share something that went well (a plus) and something that you’d like to change for next week (a delta). You can return to this list during the next meeting to ensure that you’re making changes that benefit the learning experience for everybody.

For Next Week

P2PU Facilitator Guide • The 1619 Project

Read:

- ["A Broken Health Care System" by Jeneen Interlandi](#)
- ["Traffic" by Kevin M. Krause](#)

Listen (optional):

- [1619 Podcast Episode 2: The Economy That Slavery Built](#)

Week 2

Meeting agenda:

1. Check-in (10 min)
2. Read & Discuss (35 min)
3. Reflect (10 min)
4. For Next Week

1. Welcome (15 min)

- Re-introduce facilitator(s)
- Review of Learning Circle structure (as needed)
- Review of Group Norms

10 min: Group Icebreaker ([see recommended activities](#))

2. Read & Discuss (35 min)

This section has a ~5 min break of time accounted for but not scheduled each meeting. Play by ear or discuss with your group how you'd like to use it: discussion overflow, breathing/relaxation exercises, or a brief personal time break in between readings.

15 min: Read + discuss excerpt: [“A Broken Health Care System” by Jeneen Interlandi](#)

- “Federal health care policy was designed, both implicitly and explicitly, to exclude black Americans. As a result, they faced an array of inequities—including statistically shorter, sicker lives than their white counterparts.”
- “One hundred and fifty years after the freed people of the South first petitioned the government for basic medical care, the United States remains the only high-income country in the world where such care is not guaranteed to every citizen. In the United States, racial health disparities have proved as foundational as democracy itself.”

Discussion questions:

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 author, what factors help diseases to spread in a community?

15 min: Read + discuss excerpt: [“Traffic” by Kevin M. Krause](#)

- “The postwar programs for urban renewal, for instance, destroyed black neighborhoods and displaced their residents with such regularity that African-Americans came to believe, in James Baldwin’s memorable phrase, that ‘urban renewal means Negro removal.’”
- “In the end, Atlanta’s traffic is at a standstill because its attitude about transit is at a standstill, too. Fifty years after its Interstates were set down with an eye to segregation and its rapid-transit system was stunted by white flight, the city is still stalled in the past.”

Discussion questions:

1. What policies contributed to neighborhood segregation in the U.S.?
2. How have transportation systems reinforced segregation?

3. Reflect (10 min)

- What is one thing that you felt went well in our learning circle today?
- What is one thing that you would like to see change in our learning circle next week?

For Next Week

Read

- ["Undemocratic Democracy" by Jamelle Bouie](#)
- ["Medical Inequality" by Linda Villarosa](#)

Listen (optional)

- [Podcast Episode 4: How the Bad Blood Started](#)

Week 3

Meeting agenda:

5. Check-in (10 min)
6. Read & Discuss (35 min)
7. Reflect (10 min)
8. For Next Week

1. Check-In (10 min)

- Review of Learning Circle structure (as needed)
- Review of Group Norms
- **10 min:** Group Icebreaker ([see recommended activities](#))

2. Read & Discuss (35 min)

15 min: Read + discuss excerpt: ["Undemocratic Democracy" by Jamelle Bouie](#)

- “There is a homegrown ideology of reaction in the United States, inextricably tied to our system of slavery. And while the racial content of that ideology has attenuated over time, the basic framework remains: fear of rival political majorities; of demographic ‘replacement’; of a government that threatens privilege and hierarchy.”

Discussion questions:

1. According to the author, how do 19th century U.S. political movements aimed at maintaining the right to enslave people manifest in contemporary political parties?

15 min: Read + discuss excerpt: ["Medical Inequality" by Linda Villarosa](#)

- “The centuries-old belief in racial differences in physiology has continued to mask the brutal effects of discrimination and structural inequities, instead placing blame on individuals and their communities for statistically poor health outcomes. Rather than conceptualizing race as a risk factor that predicts disease or disability because of a fixed susceptibility conceived on shaky grounds centuries ago, we would do better to understand race as a proxy for bias, disadvantage and ill treatment. The poor health outcomes of black people, the targets of discrimination over hundreds of years and numerous generations, may be a harbinger for the future health of an increasingly diverse and unequal America.”

Discussion questions:

1. What inaccurate and unfounded assumptions have doctors made throughout history about the bodies of enslaved black people, and how did they attempt to prove those assumptions?
2. How have racist medical practices and attitudes influenced the medical treatment that black Americans have received throughout history, and continue to receive today?

3. Reflect (10 min)

- What is one thing that you felt went well in our learning circle today?
- What is one thing that you would like to see change in our learning circle next week?

For Next Week

Read

- [“American Popular Music” by Wesley Morris](#)
- [“Sugar” by Khalil Gibran Muhammad](#)

Listen (optional)

- [Podcast Episode 3: The Birth of American Music](#)

Week 4

Meeting agenda:

9. Check-in (10 min)
10. Read & Discuss (35 min)
11. Reflect (10 min)
12. For Next Week

1. Check-In (10 min)

- Review of Learning Circle structure (as needed)
- Review of Group Norms
- **10 min:** Group Icebreaker ([see recommended activities](#))

2. Read & Discuss (35 min)

15 min: Read + discuss excerpt: [“American Popular Music” by Wesley Morris](#)

- “When we’re talking about black music, we’re talking about horns, drums, keyboards and guitars doing the unthinkable together. We’re also talking about what the borrowers and collaborators don’t want to or can’t lift — centuries of weight, of atrocity we’ve never sufficiently worked through, the blackness you know is beyond theft because it’s too real, too rich, too heavy to steal.”

Discussion questions:

1. How have popular musical and performance trends throughout history used traditions and styles developed by black Americans?
2. How does the author describe black music and blackness in music?

15 min: Read + discuss excerpt: [“Sugar” by Khalil Gibran Muhammad](#)

- “None of this — the extraordinary mass commodification of sugar, its economic might and outsize impact on the American diet and health — was in any way foreordained, or even predictable, when Christopher Columbus made his second voyage across the Atlantic Ocean in 1493, bringing sugar-cane stalks with him from the Spanish Canary Islands. In Europe at that time, refined sugar was a luxury product, the back-breaking toil and dangerous labor required in its manufacture an insuperable barrier to production in anything approaching bulk. It seems reasonable to imagine that it might have remained so if it weren’t for the establishment of an enormous market in enslaved laborers who had no way to opt out of the treacherous work.”

Discussion questions:

1. How is sugar produced, and why was it cultivated in what became the U.S.?
2. How has sugar production changed, and how have policies continued to limit who has access to the wealth earned from producing sugar?

3. Reflect (10 min)

- What is one thing that you felt went well in our learning circle today?
- What is one thing that you would like to see change in our learning circle next week?

For Next Week

Read

- [“The Wealth Gap” by Trymaine Lee](#)
- [“Mass Incarceration” by Bryan Stevenson](#)

Listen (optional)

- [Podcast Episode 5: The Land of Our Fathers Part 1](#)

Watch (optional)

- [Explained | Racial Wealth Gap](#) (16 min)

- [Bryan Stevenson TED2012: We need to talk about an injustice](#) (24 min)

Week 5

Meeting agenda:

- 13. Check-in (10 min)
- 14. Read & Discuss (35 min)
- 15. Reflect (10 min)
- 16. For Next Week

1. Check-In (10 min)

- Review of Learning Circle structure (as needed)
- Review of Group Norms
- **10 min:** Group Icebreaker ([see recommended activities](#))

2. Read & Discuss (35 min)

15 min: Read + discuss excerpt: [“The Wealth Gap” by Trymaine Lee](#)

- “Today’s racial wealth gap is perhaps the most glaring legacy of American slavery and the violent economic dispossession that followed.”
- “The post-Reconstruction plundering of black wealth was not just a product of spontaneous violence, but etched in law and public policy.”

Discussion questions:

1. How does a person accumulate and keep wealth in the U.S.?
2. How have policy and exclusion from government wealth-building programs limited black Americans’ opportunities to accumulate wealth?

15 min: Read + discuss excerpt: [“Mass Incarceration” by Bryan Stevenson](#)

- “The United States has the highest rate of incarceration of any nation on Earth: We represent 4 percent of the planet’s population but 22 percent of its imprisoned. In the early 1970s, our prisons held fewer than 300,000 people;

since then, that number has grown to more than 2.2 million, with 4.5 million more on probation or parole. Because of mandatory sentencing and ‘three strikes’ laws, I’ve found myself representing clients sentenced to life without parole for stealing a bicycle or for simple possession of marijuana. And central to understanding this practice of mass incarceration and excessive punishment is the legacy of slavery.”

- “It’s not just that this history fostered a view of black people as presumptively criminal. It also cultivated a tolerance for employing any level of brutality in response.”

Discussion questions:

1. How have laws been written and enforced in the U.S. over the past 400 years to disproportionality punish black Americans?
2. How does Stevenson argue that the modern day prison system acts as a continuation of slavery?

3. Reflect (10 min)

- What is one thing that you felt went well in our learning circle today?
- What is one thing that you would like to see change in our learning circle next week?

For Next Week

Read

- [“Hope, a Photo Essay” by Djeneba Aduayom \(photography\), Nikole Hannah-Jones \(introduction\), and Wadzanai Mhute \(captions\)](#)
- [“Why Can’t We Teach This?” by Nikita Stewart](#)
- [“400 Years: A Literary Timeline”](#) (optional)
- [“A Brief History of Slavery” by Mary Elliott and Jazmine Hughes](#)

Listen (optional)

- [Podcast Episode 6: The Land of Our Fathers Part 2](#)

Week 6

Meeting agenda:

- 17. Check-in (10 min)
- 18. Read & Discuss (35 min)
- 19. Reflect (10 min)
- 20. For Next Week

1. Check-In (10 min)

- Review of Learning Circle structure (as needed)
- Review of Group Norms
- **10 min:** Group Icebreaker ([see recommended activities](#))

2. Read & Discuss (35 min)

15 min: Read + discuss excerpt: [“Hope, a Photo Essay” by Djeneba Aduayom \(photography\), Nikole Hannah-Jones \(introduction\), and Wadzanai Mhute \(captions\)](#)

- “Leading up to the civil rights movement, Howard was virtually the only law school in the South that served black students. It became an incubator for those who would use the law to challenge racial apartheid in the North and the South and help make the country more fair and democratic.”
- “The school continues that legacy today, producing more black lawyers than perhaps any other institution. In May, it graduated its 148th class, and the four newly minted lawyers featured here were among the graduates. All of them descended from people enslaved in this country.” —Nikole Hannah-Jones
- “As a sixth-generation descendant of slavery, I am essentially a part of the first generation of descendants to carry the torch that was lit by my ancestors into true freedom.” —Septembra Lesane, a recent graduate of Howard University School of Law.”

Discussion questions:

1. What challenges do black Americans face in tracing lineage, and what strategies have been used to address those challenges?
2. What similarities and differences do you notice between the stories of the ancestors of the four Howard University School of Law students?
3. How do the portraits help tell the stories of the people who are profiled?

15 min: Read + discuss excerpt: [“Why Can’t We Teach This?” by Nikita Stewart](#)

- “Unlike math and reading, states are not required to meet academic content standards for teaching social studies and United States history. That means that there is no consensus on the curriculum around slavery, no uniform recommendation to explain an institution that was debated in the crafting of the Constitution and that has influenced nearly every aspect of American society since.”

Discussion questions:

1. According to the Southern Poverty Law Center’s study, what are some of the ways in which U.S. history textbooks are “failing”?
2. Why do students infrequently learn a full history of slavery in school?
3. What are some suggestions that appear in Stewart’s essay for improving education on slavery?

3. Closing Reflections (10 min)

P2PU will send out closing surveys to facilitators and participants. The information shared in these will help future facilitators plan their programs and better support their community members. You can take this time to fill those out at the same time or walk through an overall plus/delta (suggested questions below).

Final plus/delta:

- What is one thing that you felt went well in our learning circle today?
- What worked well about this learning circle overall?
- What would you change if you took this learning circle again?

Additional Meeting Topics

For longer learning circles or groups that are keen to continue meeting, consider adding extra meetings for overflow time or new topics. Facilitators have used the following themes and resources for additional meetings with their groups:

- Local Civic Action
- Reparations
- Practical Allyship ([courtesy Kitsap Regional Library](#))
 - Read: "[Be a Better Ally](#)" - Tsedale M. Melaku, Angie Beeman, David G. Smith and W. Brad Johnson (Harvard Business Review)
 - Watch: "[A guide to allyship: How to become an ally](#)" (9News)
 - Listen: "[Be a Better White Ally](#)" (first segment, from 4:20-41:50) - Up To Date (KCYR 89.3)
 - For youth and families: "[Kids Explain Allyship](#)" (Soyheat)
 - Discuss:
 - Examples of practical allyship: What does it look like in our lives? Who can we look up to?
 - Performative allyship: What is it? How can we avoid it?
 - Community allies: Who's doing the work already and how can we support it?
- Exploring (Micro)aggressions ([courtesy Kitsap Regional Library](#))
 - Read: "[Did you really just say that?](#)" - Rebecca Clay (APA Monitor on Psychology)
 - Watch: "[Why Microaggressions Aren't So Micro](#)" - Whitney Grinnage-Cassidy (TEDxYouth @UrsulineAcademy)
 - Listen: "[Microaggressions Are A Big Deal: How To Talk Them Out And When To Walk Away](#)" - Life Kit (NPR)