

# Faithful Conversations *about* *The 1619 Project*



We invite you to join with communities of faith across Iowa in faithful conversations about **The 1619 Project**. Slavery in the United States has been referenced as our “original sin.” Given that context and the fact that many communities of faith justified enslavement and benefited materially from it, or, on the flipside, worked for its elimination, it is critical the faith community intentionally study slavery and its lasting impact on the generations during and after.

The *New York Times’ The 1619 Project* by Nikole Hannah-Jones et al. is a valuable vehicle to begin a conversation within the context of faith. The Pulitzer Center and its excellent resources provide tools that enhance the original project and community conversations. Faith leaders in the Faithful Voices for Racial Justice project of the Interfaith Alliance of Iowa took on the task of designing a series to pull together the pieces for community conversation, intentionally layering in questions regarding one’s faith and how it might inform our approach to the issues raised by *The 1619 Project*.

## **The Basics About the Faithful Conversations Series**

**Conversation in community.** While you can certainly read and listen to the *Faithful Conversations* series by oneself, conversation in community brings a richness and better understanding of the issues. Community conversation means you listen as much or more than you talk, which we believe to always be a good thing.

**Faith is important for many.** The series is designed to add the element of faith to the discussion around slavery, race, racism, and racial justice. For many people, faith informs who we are, how we see the world, and our relationship to one another. We do not leave our faith at the doorstep when talking about difficult subjects and that is true when discussing our nation’s history with slavery, race, and racism. A key question for people of faith is: how does my faith inform my beliefs about slavery, race, and racism?

**Telling the whole story matters.** The Pulitzer prize-winning series, *The 1619 Project*, is a vehicle to help us learn about slavery from the perspective of Black Americans and its impact on the many generations following. Not all history books are equal and much that has been written is from a white perspective, which is often not historically accurate or complete. *The 1619 Project* is an important series of essays that helps to fill in many factual and experiential gaps left out by white historians and writers.

**Inviting all people of faith into the conversation.** It is our intent to be inclusive with this series, inviting people from different faiths and races to utilize the resource. Concepts, questions, prayers, etc., are intentionally broad. We do not assume only one faith or one race will take on

the study of *The 1619 Project*. Having said that, we did create this series to be utilized by people of faith and within a faith community.

### **Some Suggestions and Things to Know**

- Conversations around slavery, race, racism, and our nation's history may make us uncomfortable. Yet we know uncomfortableness is always a necessary element to learn. For example, when a child learns to ride a bike or swim there is an element of uncomfortableness before they learn and become proficient.
- The *Faithful Conversations* series breaks down *The 1619 Project* into five discussion sections. An introduction section has been added at the beginning of the series to lay the groundwork in having a conversation about slavery, race, and racism, issues that sometimes arise, and how to establish norms that invite good, open, productive dialogue.
- Communities of faith and small groups using the series will be provided and encouraged to follow the same format each week:
  - Read the assignment for the week
  - Watch the video of the faith leader discussion
  - Opening Covenant ([here is a sample covenant](#) you are encouraged to use)
  - Discussion using question prompts
  - Closing prayer/meditation

### **Details and Logistics**

**Six-week series.** Decide within your faith community/small group whether you will meet weekly, monthly, etc.

**Video of faith leader discussions.** The faith leader discussions can be viewed any time on YouTube or by clicking on the links below:

[Week 1](#)

[Week 2](#)

[Week 3](#)

[Week 4](#)

[Week 5](#)

[Week 6](#)

**Congregations and faith community small groups.** We encourage faith communities to promote the series and invite small groups to make commitments to participate in the series following the live stream schedule or at a time more convenient for the group using the online video.

**Ongoing resource.** The online series of faith leader discussions will be available as a resource for anyone to utilize when studying *The 1619 Project*. The series is housed on the Interfaith Alliance of Iowa YouTube channel. You can find the link and access the accompanying resources at [faithful-voices.org](https://faithful-voices.org) and linked at [interfaithallianceiowa.org](https://interfaithallianceiowa.org).

**Be prepared.** Those who have committed should read the assigned section of *The 1619 Project* for the week before viewing the faith leader video for that week. Groups can view the video and discuss the week's topic in person or by Zoom.

**Who are the faith leaders?** The faith leader discussion consists of clergy and faith leaders from across Iowa who are committed to racial justice in our state. Each online discussion by the faith leaders is 30 minutes. The faith communities and small groups should discuss the readings and faith leader conversation after viewing the live stream or recording.

**A note about COVID.** With the uptick in COVID cases across Iowa and our nation, we encourage faith communities and small groups to consider the health and safety of their members in determining the best means to convene and hold a discussion. If in person, we strongly encourage vaccines and mask-wearing. Utilizing Zoom is a good and safe alternative for groups to meet. The live stream or video of the faith leader discussion can be shared on-screen during the Zoom meeting and then the discussion can follow.

## **Resources**

*Updated 10.11.2021*

For our weekly study and conversations, *The 1619 Project* is divided into five sections. The entirety of *The 1619 Project* can be accessed through the *New York Times* or the Pulitzer Center links below. Also included are excellent reading guides from the Pulitzer Center.

- [The New York Times' The 1619 Project](#)
- [The New York Times' Broadsheet Resources](#) (from the Pulitzer Center)
- [Full Issue of The 1619 Project \(pdf\)](#)
- [Reading Guide for The 1619 Project Essays](#)
- [Reading Guide for The 1619 Project Creative Works](#)

## **Week 1**

### **Readings for Week 1**

- None

### **Faith Leader Discussion** ([click here to watch](#))

- Laying the Groundwork: Intention. Comfort vs. Discomfort. Expectations.
  - Build trust, and openness.
  - Uncomfortableness is real, and necessary.
  - Set expectations. Challenge your thinking. Lead with respect.

### **Group Covenant**

- Discussion and agreement by group members ([sample covenant](#))

### **Opening Question**

- When and how did you first become aware of racial and ethnic differences, and that people are treated differently?

### **Closing Prayer/Meditation**

- See options on pages 11-12.

## **Week 2**

### **Readings for Week 2**

- Section 1: "The Idea of America" by Nikole Hannah-Jones (pg 14-26)
- Section 2: "Chained Migration" by Tiya Miles (pg 22)

**Faith Leader Discussion** ([click here to watch](#))

### **Reading of the Group Covenant**

- We recommend the group read the covenant aloud and together.

### **Opening Questions**

- What surprised you about the history in these readings?
- Is some of this history familiar to you? How does it fit with and how does it contradict history as you have previously understood it?

### **Faith Question**

- What does what you are learning affirm, stretch, or challenge your faith and your faith tradition?

### **Pulitzer 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 was the expansion of the U.S. shaped and made possible by slave labor?

### **Closing Prayer/Meditation**

- See options on pages 11-12.

## **Week 3**

### **Readings for Week 3**

- Section 3: "Capitalism" by Matthew Desmond (pg 30-40)
- Section 4: "Mortgaging the Future" by Mehrsa Baradaran (pg 32)
- Section 5: "Good as Gold" by Mehrsa Baradaran (pg 35)
- Section 6: "Fabric of Modernity" by Mehrsa Baradaran (pg 36)
- Section 7: "Municipal Bonds" by Tiya Miles (pg 40)

### **Faith Leader Discussion** ([click here to watch](#))

### **Reading of the Group Covenant**

- We recommend the group read the covenant aloud and together.

### **Opening Questions**

- What surprised you about the history in these readings?
- Is some of this history familiar to you? How does it fit with and how does it contradict history as you have previously understood it?

### **Faith Question**

- What does what you are learning affirm, stretch, or challenge your faith and your faith tradition?

### **Pulitzer Discussion Questions**

- What current financial systems reflect practices developed to support industries built on the work of enslaved people?
- How have the laws and contracts developed before the Civil War to support the cotton industry influenced the financial documents we use today?
- How did enslaved people contribute to the construction of northeastern cities like New York City?

### **Closing Prayer/Meditation**

- See options on pages 11-12.

## **Week 4**

### **Readings for Week 4**

- Section 8: "Broken Health Care System" by Jeneen Interlandi (pg 44-45)
- Section 9: "Traffic" by Kevin M. Kruse (pg 48-49)
- Section 10: "Undemocratic Democracy" by Jamelle Bouie (pg 50-55)
- Section 11: "Medical Inequality" by Linda Villarosa (pg 56-57)

### **Faith Leader Discussion** ([click here to watch](#))

### **Reading of the Group Covenant**

- We recommend the group read the covenant aloud and together.

### **Opening Questions**

- What surprised you about the history in these readings?
- Is some of this history familiar to you? How does it fit with and how does it contradict history as you have previously understood it?

### **Faith Question**

- What does what you are learning affirm, stretch, or challenge your faith and your faith tradition?

### **Pulitzer Discussion Questions**

- According to the author, what factors help diseases to spread in a community?
- What policies contributed to neighborhood segregation in the U.S.?
- How have racist medical practices and attitudes influenced the medical treatment that Black Americans have received throughout history, and continue to receive today?

### **Closing Prayer/Meditation**

- See options on pages 11-12.



## **Week 5**

### **Readings for Week 5**

- Section 12: "American Popular Music" by Wesley Morris (pg 60-67)
- Section 13: "Sugar" by Khalil Gibran Muhammad (pg 70-77)
- Section 14: "Pecan Pioneer" by Tiya Miles (pg 76)
- Section 15: "The Wealth Gap" by Trymaine Lee (pg 82-83)

### **Faith Leader Discussion** ([click here to watch](#))

### **Reading of the Group Covenant**

- We recommend the group read the covenant aloud and together.

### **Opening Questions**

- What surprised you about the history in these readings?
- Is some of this history familiar to you? How does it fit with and how does it contradict history as you have previously understood it?

### **Faith Question**

- What does what you are learning affirm, stretch, or challenge your faith and your faith tradition?

### **Pulitzer Discussion Questions**

- How does the author describe black music and blackness in music?
- How has sugar production changed, and how have policies continued to limit who has access to the wealth earned from producing sugar?
- How have policy and exclusion from government wealth-building programs limited Black Americans' opportunities to accumulate wealth?

### **Closing Prayer/Meditation**

- See options on pages 11-12.

## **Week 6**

### **Readings for Week 6**

- Section 16: "Mass Incarceration" by Bryan Stevenson (pg 80-81)
- Section 17: "Hope" by Djeneba Aduayom, Nikole Hannah-Jones, Wadzanai Mhute (pg 86-93)
- Section 18: "Shadow of the Past" by Anne C. Bailey and Dannielle Bowman (pg 98)
- Section 19: Broadsheet from the newspaper "Why Can't We Teach This?" by Nikita Stewart (Broadsheet: pg 3)
- Section 20: OPTIONAL: [Broadsheet from the newspaper](#) by Mary Elliott, Jazmine Hughes, and Erica Deeman (Broadsheet: pg 4-14)

### **Faith Leader Discussion** ([click here to watch](#))

### **Reading of the Group Covenant**

- We recommend the group read the covenant aloud and together.

### **Opening Questions**

- What surprised you about the history in these readings?
- Is some of this history familiar to you? How does it fit with and how does it contradict history as you have previously understood it?

### **Faith Question**

- What does what you are learning affirm, stretch, or challenge your faith and your faith tradition?

### **Pulitzer Discussion Questions**

- How does Stevenson argue that the modern-day prison system acts as a continuation of slavery?
- Why do students infrequently learn a full history of slavery in school?
- What are some suggestions that appear in Stewart's essay for improving education on slavery?

### **Closing Prayer/Meditation**

- See options on pages 11-12.

## **Options for Closing Prayer or Meditation**

We encourage groups to close with the same prayer or meditation each week, speaking the words aloud and together.

### **A Prayer adapted from Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.**

Creator of all sight, when our eyes do not see the gravity of racial justice,  
Shake us from our slumber and open our eyes.

Maker of all courage and wisdom, when out of fear we are frozen into inaction,  
Give us a spirit of bravery.

When we try our best but say the wrong things,  
Give us a spirit of humility.

Divine light who birthed us all, when the chaos of this dies down,  
Give us a lasting spirit of solidarity, O Lord.

When it becomes easier to point fingers outwards,  
Help us to examine our own hearts.

Racism breaks your heart,  
break our hearts for what breaks yours.

You called us to be in relationship with one another and promised to dwell within and among us.

In our community, we are many different people; we come from many different places, have many different cultures.

Open our hearts that we may be bold in finding the riches of inclusion and the treasures of diversity among us.

We pray in faith.

## **A prayer for the beginning of difficult conversations**

O Great Spirit, from whom all life flows and all creation is fed,

heal the brokenness among us.

May your steady waters trickle into hard hearts,

cracking them open to let love trickle in,

From your clear waters, give us vision —

a willingness to unlearn what we thought we knew

and see with clarity the Truth,

Bringing forth a clear path toward reconciliation.

Come among us now, bringing peace to our hearts and homes,

That from there your Divine love rushes forth

Creating our world anew.

faithful **voices**  
for  
**RACiAL JUSTiCE**  
a project of Interfaith Alliance of Iowa

**Faithful Voices for Racial Justice is a project of Interfaith Alliance of Iowa.** If you would like more information or would like to join the work, please contact Connie Ryan at [connie@interfaithallianceiowa.org](mailto:connie@interfaithallianceiowa.org).



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