

400 Years

Discussing
Slavery,
Freedom,
& Race
in America

A Guide for National Park Service Interpreters





400 Years: Discussing Slavery, Freedom, & Race in America

This guide was created by the National Park Service WASO Office of Interpretation, Education and Volunteers (IEV) in conjunction with the Stephen T. Mather Training Center.

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TEAM MEMBERS:

April Finley	Park Guide, Selma to Montgomery NHT
Rufai Sharfow	Park Guide, New Bedford Whaling NHP
Mynasha Spencer	Park Ranger, Brown v. Board NHS
Camille Vincent	Park Ranger, Tuskegee Airmen NHS

REVIEWERS:

Eola Dance	NER Cultural Anthropologist
Tyronne Brandyburg	Superintendent, Harpers Ferry NHP
Turkiya Lowe	NPS Chief Historian
Kerry Olson	NPS Chief of Interpretation, Education and Volunteers

SUPPORT:

David Vela	NPS Acting Deputy Director for Operations
Tom Medema	Acting Associate Director, WASO IEV
Terry Brown	Superintendent, Fort Monroe NM
Carol McBryant	Relevancy, Diversity, and Inclusion Strategist, WASO IEV
John Rudy	Park Ranger / Interpretive Trainer, Mather Training Center
Francesca A. Calarco	AmeriCorps VISTA, WASO IEV



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Introduction

2019 marks the 400th anniversary of the first landing of enslaved Africans in English-occupied North America at Point Comfort in Hampton, VA, a site now known as Fort Monroe National Monument. While Fort Monroe shares and preserves this significant piece of American history, the past 400 years reverberate far beyond the national monument and are relevant today across the nation.

National Park Service sites provide tangible and vital settings that bring history forward to inform our present and future. All park units and programs are invited to find their piece of this American story to share and lead a dialogue about its relevance to America today. We have a great opportunity and an obligation to engage audiences across the nation to honor the significance of 400 years of African American history and culture.

Some histories and conversations will be easier than others. In finding each park's connection to this story, we collectively open up to the national narrative to an inclusive conversation. This guide was designed by and for National Park Service interpreters to help us find inspiration and tools that go well beyond the 400th Anniversary. These opportunities present themselves in many park units whether cultural, natural, or recreational in nature.

As you prepare your programs and dialogues, work collaboratively with park and regional historians to access new and contemporary research. Gain support from your park leadership, and invite your community in to facilitate co-created programming. Finally, please share your experiences with your fellow interpreters through peer collaboration tools such as the Common Learning Portal, so we can continue developing our community of practice around this and other important topics and interests.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "David Vela".

David Vela
Acting Deputy Director for Operations



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What is This Document?

This discussion guide was created by interpreters, for interpreters.

It was designed to provide information about how to approach dialogue surrounding the history of slavery, freedom, and race in America. This guide was created to help interpreters generate ideas and options for how to have deep conversations around race with your park's visitors. The example dialogic questions in this guide will help you craft your own experiences. In short, this document is a simple framework. It is up to you to tie the discussion to the place you interpret.

While this guide contains examples of historical stories at certain parks related to slavery, freedom, and race in America, many of these dialogic approaches can be applied in different settings. Many stories like these *are* out there waiting to be told, including at your own park.

Every site in the National Park Service has a part of this story buried within its landscape. There are many local resources that can help you find stories of race in your place. Community members and cultural resource experts work in your parks or live just beyond their boundaries. Reaching out to these knowledgeable people can help you find the story of your place.

This guide includes an extensive annotated bibliography. Many of the sources listed will help you as you begin searching for your site's story, and deepen your knowledge of how race and slavery echo within your place, as well as your park's role in the greater American narrative.

Lastly, this guide is a work of encouragement: tell these stories and have these discussions.

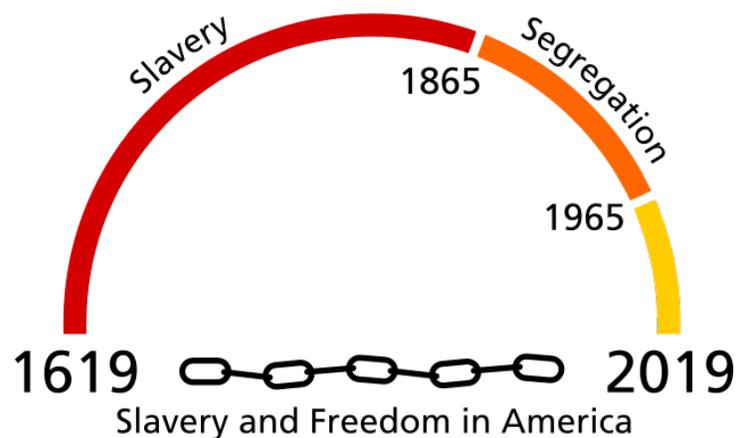


The Story of 1619 has Lasting Impacts Today

This story starts aboard the Portuguese slave ship *San Juan Bautista* on the West African coast. Strife was only beginning, while at sea the English ships *White Lyon* and *Treasurer* attacked the *San Juan Bautista* and the English crews confiscated the ship's most valuable cargo: human beings.

As the *White Lyon* approached [Old Point Comfort](#) (present-day [Fort Monroe](#)), the New World did not mean hope or opportunity. When the ship docked the crew of the *White Lyon* traded, "20 and odd Negroes, " with John Rolfe in exchange for food and the ship sailed away. A few days later, the *Treasurer* bartered another 24 human beings for supplies, and the captive Africans entered a strange new world.

These first captive Africans stood at the beginning of a history of racialized slavery in America that lasted for nearly two and a half centuries. Before the Pilgrims landed in Plymouth, Massachusetts, those first enslaved people walked the shores of the Virginia colony. As the concept of the American dream germinated, it had at its center a pernicious racism.



It must be noted that those "20 and odd" Africans were not originally intended for the English colonies; they were bound for the Caribbean and South America where the Spanish had already established slavery. In fact, the Spanish had previously brought enslaved Africans [more than a century earlier](#) to other parts of the Americas, including to the present-day southern and southwestern United States. This prominent Afro-Latino history is also reflected throughout national park sites, including Coronado National Memorial's story of [Esteban de Dorantes](#), an



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enslaved member of the Narváez and Coronado Expedition, as well as Castillo de San Marcos National Monument's story of the 1565 founding of [St. Augustine](#).

Nevertheless, the English colonists made a deliberate choice in 1619. They chose to buy human beings and form a slaveholding society, inaugurating a distinct form of slavery in the United States that would endure for centuries.

Even after slavery ended in 1865 with the passage of the [13th Amendment](#), the legacies of the hatred the institution implanted would linger. It would take on the forms of racial violence and segregation rampant across the United States, north and south, leaving the formerly enslaved and their descendants to grapple with systemic injustice and inequality.

The story of the old Point Comfort enslaved Africans, in what would one day become the United States, is not simply a narrative of the past. We still live with the very tangible remnants of slavery and segregation today. The erasure of an uncomfortable past is not just. Through conversations around these remnants, we can help our nation grow and begin to heal. These conversations belong in every one of our National Park Service sites.



Watch the [Hampton 2019 Commemorative Commission Documentary \(11 min, 5 sec\)](#).



Using Dialogue to Heal Trauma

The societal wounds that we do not talk about fester the most, yet the malevolent impact of racialized American slavery and the consequent social reverberations are still present. This reality can make the issue of slavery daunting to discuss.

That said, discussion is the necessary tool to help America move beyond the harm. Other nations and organizations have found just how productive the open investigation of discrimination can be to move towards healing. By looking at the actions from our own lives that help contribute to problems in society, we can all begin to heal and grow.

One example of this approach through dialogue comes from South Africa. As the nation escaped the systematized racial segregation system known as apartheid in the early 1990s, the government established their own Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). The TRC was tasked with hearing testimony from both the oppressed (people of color within South Africa) and the oppressor class (white South Africans).

The purpose of the TRC was not to punish those who had caused harm. It existed and functioned to bear witness to the harm that had happened, and to try to understand why people made choices that harmed others. By fostering an environment of listening and understanding to help uproot the seeds of hate, the South African government took the first steps towards a greater, ongoing process and conversation.

As South Africans were exploring ways to heal from apartheid, a close-knit group of museums was beginning to coalesce around the concept of dialogue. Originally spearheaded by [Ruth Abram](#) at the Lower East Side Tenement Museum in New York City, the [International Coalition of Sites of Conscience](#) has become a worldwide leader in using cultural and natural history sites as hosts for conversations about how the events of yesterday echo today.



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The Coalition describes their members' as being centered on, "a more just and humane future." The National Park Service as a whole was one of the early members of the Coalition. Individual park units and their partners across the country have also become Sites of Conscience:

- Andersonville National Historic Site
- Brown v. Board of Education National Historic Site
- Ford's Theatre
- Golden Gate National Recreation Area
- Grand Teton National Park
- Harriet Tubman Underground Railroad National Historical Park
- Joshua Tree National Park
- Keweenaw National Historical Park
- Little Rock Central High School National Historic Site
- Lowell National Historical Park
- Manzanar National Historic Site
- Minidoka National Historic Site
- Minuteman Missile National Historic Site
- Oklahoma City National Memorial
- Paterson Great Falls National Historical Park
- Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area
- Statue of Liberty National Monument and Ellis Island
- Tule Lake Unit, World War II Valor in the Pacific National Monument
- Ulysses S. Grant National Historic Site
- Women's Rights National Historical Park

The Coalition advocates for deep dialogue as a means of building empathy and bringing visitors together in meaningful ways. Their ["Arc of Dialogue"](#) model can be a formal way to lead groups through discussions of important and pressing issues. They advocate an approach that can be employed everywhere. This impactful approach aims to fill every moment of a visitor's experience with opportunities to express themselves, process the expression of others, reflect on their life experiences, and begin formulating ideas for the future.

The National Park Service is taking this approach to dialogue as well, shifting from long, structured dialogue experiences toward a pervasive opportunity for expression. Each interaction with a visitor, from the humblest wayside to the grandest ranger program, should have some elements which



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allow the audience to share their life experiences and engage with the life experiences of their fellow visitors.

The shift toward an Audience Centered Experience means a shift toward integrating visitors' life stories as a crucial tie-in to interpretive content. This means that pairing questions about visitors' lived experiences with powerful resource stories from a national park can allow for visitors to find their own lives echoed and mirrored in the site. Honing this method of building empathy to the people (past and present) of your site can be a crucial and invaluable skillset as an interpreter.

A good dialogic approach is [O.R.A.C.L.E., the Only Right Answer Comes from the Lived Experience](#) of the visitors. They can answer with no special outside knowledge or expertise; just being themselves can allow them to engage. By focusing on universal experiences, feelings of loss, triumph, joy, sorrow, hope, and exclusion, interpretive experiences can start to build bridges between visitors and those around them.

The demographic groups who visit National Parks often do not look like the enslaved who landed in Virginia in 1619. They often do not look like the free men and women of color who advocated for an end to slavery in the streets of Boston, Massachusetts. They often do not look like the black men and women who boycotted busses in Montgomery, Alabama. However, by focusing on the elements of shared humanity we can build analogies, empathy, and understanding.

We can help the visitors in our parks see the moments from their lives that help them feel, however small a feeling, a bit of what the people of the past experienced.



Roads for Discussion

Planning out a discussion about slavery, or the struggle over race in America, can seem overwhelming. But when the questions are about the visitors' lived experience, not their opinions about slavery or racial injustice, it can help with the exploration of commonality over difference. When questions are O.R.A.C.L.E., the Only Right Answer Comes from the Lived Experience of the visitors, the discussion builds toward productive, not destructive, ends.

This guide includes a few sample questions and case studies to help you explore the legacies of slavery and racial segregation with visitors at your site. Note that these questions almost never use charged language, like "race," "slavery," "oppression," "reparations," etc. Instead, they start with the more universal elements of each of these stories that are then built upon to move the discussion towards the heavier elements of sites' narratives.

Due to the weight of stories surrounding slavery and race in America, it is often best to share the site's stories **after** participants have had a chance to share their own experiences. This way a visitor's thought process is not sidetracked by a site's potentially grandiose narrative, or impacted by preconceived notions surrounding the ultimate topic of conversation. It is also important to remember visitors should self-select for participation in these opportunities and are more likely to engage fully if they are aware of content ahead of time.

With each example question and case study, you will also be presented a **teaching technique** to help make sharing easier and more fruitful. These techniques can help make answering less intimidating, offer some anonymity for sharing tough stories, and allow for visitors to express themselves in different, vibrant ways. As you explore these sample questions, ask yourself what story from your site you might pair with a certain **dialogic question**.

What small moments from the history of race in your park's resource can help power a conversation and build a deep moment of empathy with the people of the past?

The following examples are meant as inspiration; you might find new or different techniques that work better for your site. If you are looking for more information on crafting interactive Audience Centered Experiences around this or other topics, explore the [ACE Workbook on the NPS Common Learning Portal](#).



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When have you had to show courage in your life?

Site: [Harriet Tubman Underground Railroad National Historical Park](#)

Dialogic Question: When have you had to show courage in your life?

Technique: **Mutual Invitation**

Each speaker personally invites the next participant to share their perspective or story, re-asking the question to their fellow visitors. This gives the group a sense that they, and not the interpreter, own the conversation and that contributions are valued by the rest of the group.

Story:

She had freed herself, the young girl named Araminta who later renamed herself [Harriet](#), was nearly killed when she was 13 years old by a blow to the head. This blow to the head caused Tubman to have sleeping spells (epilepsy) her entire life. With the help of her mother she healed, and her recovery was powered by a determination that she would one day free herself.

That day came in 1849, when Harriet Tubman ran from the plantation where she had grown up on Maryland's Eastern Shore and found new freedom. The people who claimed to own her offered a \$100 bounty for her head. If she remained in the North, she would likely never risk capture and re-enslavement.

Yet she refused to stay in safety, not when her family and friends were still enslaved. She spent the next ten years making approximately 13 trips to Maryland to rescue them, risking her own freedom to give the gift of freedom to others.



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When have you felt like you were not good enough?

Site: [Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail](#)

Dialogic Question: When have you felt like you were not good enough?

Technique: **Graffiti wall**

Visitors draw or write their responses on a whiteboard or large paper posted on a wall. They then walk by and view the drawings/writings, adding comments or discussing in small groups as they wish to interact. This can allow for freer expression than words alone and provide time for reflection. The anonymity can also allow for the expression of difficult thoughts or feelings.

Story:

The Corps of Discovery finally arrived at the Pacific Ocean in 1805 after an arduous journey across towering mountains and through treacherous rapids. Expedition leaders [Meriwether Lewis](#) and [William Clark](#) had to decide where to set up winter camp. They were in charge, they could have just made the decision themselves.

But they did not. Lewis and Clark invited the entire Corps of Discovery to help decide where to establish their camp. They put the decision up to a vote and every member of the expedition was allowed to have their voice heard, including Native American guide [Sacagawea](#) and enslaved African American [York](#).

At that moment, as the expedition voted on where to establish their camp, democracy was more alive in the Oregon Country than it was in the United States. A black, enslaved man was given a voice in a democratic decision, unheard of on the East Coast. Sacagawea and York must have felt torn. They were good enough at that moment, however, everywhere else in their lives they were never good enough simply because of who they were and how they looked.



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Which everyday people are heroes and heroines in your local community?

Site: [Birmingham Civil Rights National Monument](#)

Dialogic Question: Which everyday people are heroes and heroines in your local community?

Technique: **Serial Testimony**

Each group member shares a story for a short, established time (perhaps 1-2 minutes). The facilitator helps keep time and move the opportunity to the next visitor, giving some signal for a visitor to close their thoughts. Every visitor is allowed to answer sequentially. This can allow for all voices to be heard equally and keeps one voice from dominating the conversation.

Story:

Fighting for civil rights requires economic resources and Birmingham's black population was largely running on fumes. Segregation and Jim Crow policies meant opportunities for advancement and the bounty they brought almost always went to white faces.

[A. G. Gaston](#) knew he had been blessed with plenty. The grandson of the formerly enslaved, Gaston grew from humble roots in his family's log cabin to become Alabama's first black millionaire. He operated the Booker T. Washington Insurance Company, offering life insurance to the region's black families. He opened the Citizens Federal Savings and Loan Association, Birmingham's first black-owned financial institution in decades.

But Gaston did not just serve the community through his businesses. When the activists came calling, he bankrolled Civil Rights. When [Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr.](#) and [Rev. Ralph Abernathy](#) were arrested, it was Gaston who posted their bail, even though he disagreed with their tactics. Though he often butted heads with King and the [Southern Christian Leadership Conference \(SCLC\)](#), Gaston was still ready to help fund the crusade for rights. He realized any enemy of segregation was his friend.



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When have you felt that your home, the safe place in your life, has been threatened?

Site: [Gettysburg National Military Park](#)

Dialogic Question: When have you felt that your home, the safe place in your life, has been threatened?

Technique: [Art Gallery](#)

Visitors are asked to draw or write their answer to the question using provided supplies: large sheets of paper, art supplies, etc. They hang their illustrations in a prominent place: on a wall, corkboard, clothesline, etc. Visitors are then encouraged to look at the art or responses posted by others. The facilitator then leads an unwrap discussion about the posted responses.

Story:

James Warfield was the best blacksmith in Adams County, Pennsylvania, a county famed for blacksmithing and its fine carriages. He and his daughters lived on [their farm](#) south of town, working the land and metalworking in his shop attached to the house. The ridge where his farm stood still bears his name.

It is easy to wander across James Warfield's farm today and not realize that he was a black man. His family was already balancing on a knife's edge. Just a few miles to the south was the Mason-Dixon Line, the invisible barrier between the free state of Pennsylvania and the slave state of Maryland. The Warfields had freedom in Gettysburg, but slavery was just a stone's throw away.

In 1863, the Mason-Dixon Line all but disappeared. When the Confederate Army invaded Pennsylvania none of Warfield's prestige mattered. Everything the black man and his family had built could be snatched away in one moment. The Confederate army was on a "slave raid" in Pennsylvania, grabbing every black man, woman, and child to bring them south. Black citizens were left with two options: be seized by the rebel army and enslaved, or run for their lives.

Warfield and his family fled their home, and luckily stayed free.



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How has your education shaped who you are?

Site: [Martin Luther King Jr. National Historical Park](#)

Dialogic Question: How has your education shaped who you are?

Technique: **Using Self as a Model**

To help spark the sharing, the interpreter answers the question first, sharing a personal story or experience. This can help inspire people to look at their lives honestly and serve as a brave example to encourage others to share with a larger group.

Story:

[Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.](#) grew up in Atlanta's Sweet Auburn. Along Auburn Avenue, he found his first education, lifted up by his family and friends. In their home, King's parents and grandparents all ate together and discussed the issues of the day with the whole family. No matter their age, King and his siblings were welcomed into the conversation. Alberta William King, the future Civil Rights leader's mother, was a schoolteacher who made sure all of her children could read even before they went to kindergarten.

That strong foundation set Martin Luther King, Jr. up for success. In the home on Auburn Avenue he found a love for learning. King was so far ahead that he skipped his senior year of High School, enrolling at Morehouse College and continuing his family's legacy of valuing their education.



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Where do you go to escape the pressures of the world?

Site: [Shenandoah National Park](#)

Dialogic Question: Where do you go to escape the pressures of the world?

Technique: **Art Gallery**

Visitors are asked to draw or write their answer to the question using provided supplies: large sheets of paper, art supplies, etc. They hang their illustrations in a prominent place: on a wall, corkboard, clothesline, etc. Visitors are then encouraged to look at the art or responses posted by others. The facilitator then leads an unwrap discussion about the posted responses.

Story:

Shenandoah National Park's [segregation policy](#) was quite clear; it allowed Virginia's parks to operate, "separate facilities for white and colored people to the extent only as is necessary to conform with the generally accepted customs long established in Virginia..." In general, segregation was quite prevalent throughout Virginia, as much a part of the state's bedrock as the Blue Ridge's granite foundations.

As the park opened its first picnic grounds and other visitor facilities, plans were made for, "a development for colored people," at Lewis Mountain. Just like the rest of the park's facilities, all of which were whites-only, the plans called for a campground, lodge, and camping cabins.

For two decades, black tourists from Washington, D.C. and Baltimore traveled to Shenandoah for relaxation. They came seeking what so many others hoped to find: fresh air and an escape from the hustle and bustle of the two metropolises.

Yet even here, in the forests of Virginia's mountains, they could not escape the pernicious effects of race and segregation. Nature saw no difference between black and white, but the men who ran the National Park Service did.



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When have you felt betrayed by a close friend?

Site: [Tuskegee Airmen National Historic Site](#)

Dialogic Question: When have you felt betrayed by a close friend?

Technique: **Pair or Triad Share**

Visitors speak to one or two others in response to a question in a small group. This may be a new person they introduce themselves to, or someone they have come to the park with. Especially with questions that require tougher, deeper answers, smaller groups can be safer spaces to share.

Story:

Though they fought for freedom in the air above Europe, when the [Tuskegee Airmen](#) returned home they found their own freedoms lacking and were reminded almost immediately of their race. In the north and south, businesses displayed signs reading, "Whites Only." The veterans of the Tuskegee Airmen were good enough to die for their fellow citizens, but apparently not good enough to sit next to them at a lunch counter.

Some African Americans could see the moment coming. Many black men and women through their efforts behind the ["Double V" campaign](#), advocated not just for the defeat of Nazi tyranny abroad, but segregation's tyranny at home. Still, others expressed their fears in poetry, illustrating the fact that racism was just as potent at home as in Europe.

In 1942, J. Farley Ragland from Lawrenceville, Virginia submitted a poem to the Baltimore Afro-American, "Freedom still is just a notion / To the folks like me and you." The poem bitingly rhymed, "What shall be our future portion / When this war of wars is through?" But as World War II ended, the future portion of African Americans was still in doubt.



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When have you worked really hard for something, did not achieve it, but were still proud?

Site: [Selma to Montgomery National Historic Trail](#)

Dialogic Question: When have you worked really hard for something, did not achieve it, but were still proud?

Technique: [Wagon Wheel](#) / [Concentric Circles](#) / [Speed Dating](#)

Visitors form two equal-numbered circles, one inside the other. The inside circle faces out, and outside faces in. They respond to a question in pairs with the person they are facing. After each person responds, the outer circle shifts to the right by one person, so new pairs are formed each time. This can allow visitors to hear a variety of responses, and to “practice” their response for later sharing with a larger group.

Story:

In 1966, after the [Voting Rights Act](#) passed, there was only one political party in the county. The Democratic Party in Lowndes County, and across the south, had long used the symbol of the rooster. In 1904, when it became the official symbol of Alabama’s Democratic Party, it also included the official party slogan: “White Supremacy, For the Right.”

The black citizens of [Lowndes County](#) could vote, but the only political party they could join was stacked against them. They needed a new party. Black voters created the Lowndes County Freedom Organization (LCFO).

The new party nominated candidates up and down the local ballot. But just because legal barriers to equality had fallen did not mean that the world could change instantly. The LCFO lost every race where it fielded a candidate, though the numbers did look promising for the future. Even if they failed during that first election, the LCFO proved that black faces could be viable candidates and that black voters had the potential to become a powerful bloc.



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How did you feel when someone else's decision threatened your safety?

Site: [Brown v. Board of Education National Historic Site](#)

Dialogic Question: How did you feel when someone else's decision threatened your safety?

Technique: **Photolanguage**

Participants respond to the question by selecting from a set of images, usually abstract and not directly responsive to the question (e.g. if the question is about "patriotism," the photoset has no American flags). After selecting the photo that helps them answer the question, they discuss why that was their choice with other visitors. See [this example photolanguage set](#) curated by the Interpretive Development Program.

Story:

The Supreme Court's landmark [Brown v. Board of Education](#) decision in 1954 changed the way America looked at its core. The court decided that separate was not equal, and that public schools must be integrated with all deliberate speed.

But that positive decision had unintended consequences. For African American teachers across Kansas, integration seemed like a setback, not a moment of triumph. They feared for their students and themselves. Would their students get the care they needed, or were they being tossed into unsafe environments with no protection from racism? And as schools integrated, would black teachers lose their jobs as white teachers, who deeply benefitted from segregated schools themselves, were kept in positions over new black teachers.

The integration of America's schools was a moment when the nation took a step forward. But it required some to sacrifice more. The mental and economic instability was not these teachers' choice, but they sacrificed it anyways for a greater good.



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When have you found a place you call home?

Site: [Yosemite National Park](#)

Dialogic Question: When have you found a place you call home?

Technique: **Mutual Invitation**

Each speaker personally invites the next participant to share their perspective or story, re-asking the question to their fellow visitors. This gives the group a sense that they, and not the interpreter, own the conversation and that contributions are valued by the rest of the group.

Story:

The hills and valleys of Yosemite have been a home for African Americans for generations. About 500 [Buffalo Soldiers](#), black soldiers from the 24th U.S. Infantry and 9th U.S. Cavalry, served in Yosemite National Park and nearby Sequoia National Park. They were some of the first men sent to keep the area safe, arresting poachers, chasing timber thieves, and fighting forest fires.

They called this place home and treated it with deep love. The Buffalo Soldiers built an arboretum in the park near the south fork of the Merced River in 1904. These black men lovingly crafted what is cited as the first marked nature trail in the entire national park system.

And other generations of black men and women called Yosemite a home-away-from-home too. In the 1957 edition of his, "[Negro Traveler's Green Book](#)," Hugo Green listed five different hotels that offered accommodations to black visitors: Hotel Ahwahnee, Yosemite Lodge, Camp Curry, Glacier Point Hotel, and the High Sierra Hotel. Though the streets of major American cities still saw fit to underline the difference between white and black, in the Yosemite Valley these tourists could dine and sleep in integrated equality.



Pressing through the Barriers to Dialogue

As interpreters we often find ourselves in situations where facilitating a dialogue becomes uncomfortable, to the point where we simply just want to step away. In some cases stepping away is the best and safest decision you can make in the moment. However, in most cases the means of overcoming discomfort may be as simple as gaining more experience in facilitating dialogues and understanding that you are not alone; we all have concerns and can encounter barriers that may hold us back from diving into difficult topics and conversations.

Tackling issues around race in America can be tough for anyone, though the reality of your own identity may result in different expectations from visitors. As you approach these conversations, think of who you are, and be honest with how you relate to these stories. The strategies you can use to keep yourself emotionally safe start with you:

For interpreters of color: The predominant audience demographics in your park may not look like you, which can be deeply challenging. Take care of yourself first. Talking about race and identity in America can be emotionally and physically draining. Give yourself the permission to step away from conversations that become too harsh. Realize that no one will be completely changed by a visit to one park. In interpretation, we plant seeds of personal growth that may someday sprout into greater acceptance and empathy, so do not fret if you don't see the change happening. When you have made the progress you think you can, or when you feel that a conversation is no longer happening in good faith, it is fine to disengage and take a moment to reflect, decompress, and recharge.

For white interpreters: Your role is twofold. Like your colleagues of color, you get the chance to host deeply powerful conversations on race and identity. But being a member of the majority group in America, and looking like our visitor population, brings with it some responsibilities as well. You need to be an ally for the people around you, advocating for their wishes, elevating their voices, shielding them from harm when they ask, and helping keep everyone safe. Always remember that no one should be asked to speak for their entire race; individuals share individual stories, not collective ones. If you are questioned on "why you care about these stories," remember to ground your answer in the truth that "these stories are American stories," and it is your job to share factually accurate American stories.



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We know this work can be hard, and that the barriers to doing it may feel overwhelming for you in the field, so, as a part of this discussion guide we have come up with some **CONCERNS** that you might have, as well as potential **STRATEGIES** to approach them. It is our hope that you see this as inspiration and take courage to begin to talk about this part of our American History even as it includes such topics as slavery, the civil war, oppression, racism, exclusion and much more.

CONCERN: What if people are not interested in engaging in how they feel or in sharing their own personal experience, they just want to hear “the history.”

STRATEGY: This is something we run into quite often; some people are not used to opening up. Try starting the program by beginning with an icebreaker or seemingly unrelated activity or conversation that gets everyone warmed up and talking. Building trust this way will help with engagement by leading them from an unrelated topic into the topic of the program while easing tensions.

Never force people to engage. Be observant and evaluate whether or not individuals are drawn in as the “story” begins to unfold through other’s participating.

CONCERN: How do I make sure all visitors find relevance in my programs or in our conversations on this topic? In the past I might have excluded cultures and histories, but now as I add more I do not want to exclude others. I guess I fear I will not be able to find the balance.

STRATEGY: Realize that balance is not always what we need to do as interpreters; it is engagement in multiple perspectives of the same story. Know the history so well that you can include multiple perspectives in your program, build a lens from which new and valid angles of history can be seen.

CONCERN: What if a visitor asks you to stop your talk or engagement, because they are becoming uncomfortable?



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STRATEGY: History is uncomfortable. Making sure that *you* are “comfortable” and confident with what you are saying is an important first step. Expect when discussing complex topics that someone could become uncomfortable, work toward empathy.

A depth of knowledge can also aid in disarming tense situations. Know your topic inside and out. Do the best research you can and constantly be curious. But also, remember that dialogue is about the world and our visitors today, not about a debate over the past. Keeping visitor engagement truly dialogic and O.R.A.C.L.E. can help to defuse “debate,” as well as “discomfort,” before it starts by putting visitors in a mind frame to find common ground.

It is okay for visitors to feel uncomfortable, it is also okay for visitors to walk away. The opposite of uncomfortable is comfortable.

CONCERN: What if visitors feel emboldened to share their views about history using antiquated language or racial slurs?

STRATEGY: Words matter; this becomes an opportunity to engage your audience in harmful nature of some language. When a harmful word enters the discussion, take a break from the dialogue for a moment of silence and reflection. Then ask everyone to write how they're feeling at the moment. Collect the cards and discuss the “temperature” of the group, and how moments like this make us all feel. Do not try to focus on intentions, but rather on the reality of how others feel amidst the word or phrase and why this might be hurtful.

CONCERN: What if my questions or programming offends a visitor?

STRATEGY: Certain topics are harder for some than others; the nature of sharing stories from history that may be new to a visitor or challenge their pre-existing understanding can inadvertently create offense. If someone challenges your interpretation or becomes offended, remain calm yourself. Seek first to understand; ask them clarifying questions about their perspectives and beliefs. Questions like “How did you first learn about that?” or “Why is that belief important to who you are?” can help you try to empathize and understand your visitors' perspectives. Some visitors might be skeptical of the stories of underrepresented people. Offering those visitors some of the primary documents that help support your story could help them draw new conclusions and see alternate perspectives.



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CONCERN: What if a visitor tells me that “African Americans need to stop complaining and get over it”?

STRATEGY: It is our obligation and responsibility to engage visitors in a complete and accurate history. One cannot “get over” something that is ongoing or has ongoing consequences / impacts. Our nation pledges a universal commitment to “never forget” each time there is a national tragedy such as 9/11. In this vein, let us “never forget” the humanitarian tragedies of slavery, lynchings, racism, and countless related consequences. Often those who suggest someone “get over it” have not had the same personal life experiences of those most impacted. Drawing analogies, such as 9/11 or the Pearl Harbor attack for example, in an attempt to elicit empathy may be useful in certain cases.

CONCERN: What if a visitor brings up politics or social justice movements?

STRATEGY: Engage them as a facilitator of the dialogue. Many of our parks are about politics. Let the engagement flow, let your audience maneuver the topics. Interpret the history and ask well created O.R.A.C.L.E. questions. You are allowed to engage in the history and relevance of political topics and events, you are not allowed to express your personal politics. When answering political questions or comments, refer the topic or question back to something historical. For example; voting rights or other topics from your site. It will help to have people find a way to connect the contemporary inquiry to the park's story.

CONCERN: I am white, how can I responsibly talk about black stories?

STRATEGY: Owning both your intent and impact as you discuss race is important. Making your intentions known can be a useful way to approach discussing black history as a white interpreter. Be aware of the color of your skin, that there are some parts of the story you will never truly understand, and being honest about that fact is also crucial.

Remember that when engaging your audience in the history of any community different than your own, it helps when you are able to give examples of who you learned something from. You know this stuff not just from a book, but from the relationships you have created with African American historians and community members.



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Be careful not to ask a black person on your program to be the spokesperson for all African Americans.

CONCERN: What if I cannot find a way to connect to the story I am telling?

STRATEGY: Not having a connection to the story can make it much more difficult to relay the information to an audience and will be less convincing. If you truly cannot connect, examine why you are not connecting or where you are having issues. To certain audiences, that disconnect may actually be a good thing, especially if you are able to be honest with them and discuss how you are able to appreciate this story and acknowledge its significance without a personal connection. That empathetic skill is crucial when doing interpretation. The space where you cannot connect may be where others can.

CONCERN: What if my supervisor does not support engagement in the 400th, because it is not a part of "our park's histories?"

STRATEGY: All park interpretive content is locally driven by individual park leadership and park planning documents. Park leaders or supervisors may have varying reasons to avoid certain topics based on park history, park themes, or even their assessment of the skill level of the interpreters. WASO leadership, however, has made it clear that parks are encouraged to look for untold stories in their parks and be flexible in interpreting their enabling legislation or printed interpretive themes. The meanings and significance of park sites evolve over time as our understanding grows, which should be reflected in our interpretation. Making sure you find a way, including your own research, to make the connection between your park's history and African American history.

Engaging in the [Bell Ceremony on August 25, 2019](#) or posting information about the 400th may be a great way to engage visitors through informal dialogue of this important mark in our American history.

CONCERN: How will my "regular" visitors respond when I begin to open up my park's interpretive program to histories that we have excluded in the past?



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STRATEGY: The key here is integration, not segregation. Separate programming is not the answer; separate is never equal. Incorporating the new stories and themes alongside the “old” ones can help draw in and let “regular” or legacy visitors realize we are not replacing a story, but just adding new and engaging perspectives.

CONCERN: What if someone intentionally causes a disruption?

STRATEGY: This is the ultimate fear: a protestor or bad actor coming to a park for the sake of causing a disruption or disturbance. If you find the atmosphere getting potentially volatile, or that you yourself are a target of specific hate, singled out because of how you look, who you are, or because of the interpretive story you are sharing, your first duty is to keep yourself safe. Step away if you need to. Do not hesitate to end an interaction, retreat from a location, or seek out another staff member for safety in numbers. If you feel physically threatened or that visitors are being threatened, dial 911 or the park’s dispatch.

NOTE: If this is an ongoing concern at your site, engage your supervisor and ask for a formal safety protocol and actions for this situation.

CONCERN: I am afraid that my audience won’t make the connection between their answers to the question and that of the African American experience (maybe because of how they were raised or taught growing up).

STRATEGY: This is where empathy is important. If visitors consciously are not connecting because of something in their past, maybe asking them to step outside themselves for a moment or engaging them in an activity that specifically puts them in another’s shoes, will help to open them up.



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Resilience & Courage

Helping the visitors at our National Park sites explore race and the legacy of slavery will be tough.

The experiences you offer to visitors, using powerful stories, ACE techniques, and dialogic questions, can help build new bridges to make America a better place.

This work will help build empathy by creating opportunities to connect with the people of the past, as well as aid in fostering understanding in small ways the large feelings experienced centuries ago. Moreover, visitors will also have a chance to empathize with the others around them.

Good interpretation does not just build a bridge between the visitor and the past, it also builds a bridge from visitor to visitor.

Approaching the work means having courage. It also means making a commitment to care, about yourself, your co-workers, and our visitors. Conversations that help us grow happen when we create environments where everyone feels safe sharing their life experiences. These environments are built and nurtured by being there to catch people when they stumble.

We encourage you to step forward, share the stories of race and slavery that resonate at your site. Ask deep questions, and then join in as you and your visitors discuss our lives and the legacies of race and slavery we ALL still feel today.

We are right by your side...



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“Public service institutions will never be better than the people who manage them. Therefore, frontline interpreters must lead gently and pointedly in these civic spaces. Even when that whole story may conflict with some of the more popular stories.”

Mynasha Spencer

“You got this. You chose this career for a reason. Though this task may be challenging, you have found ways to overcome other challenges in the past. If you haven’t, think of the challenges this population has faced over the last 400 years and draw inspiration from them.

You CAN do this.”

April Finley

“History is not a series of bullet points set in stone, it is an active review of the written record and evidence. So long as you do your homework and ground your interpretation in facts and resources, it is possible to be prepared talking about an uncomfortable past (or present).”

Francesca Calarco

“Trying to impact everyone isn’t a reality. If you impact one person you did something great! Some people are not willing to change. Accept that and know you did your best.”

Camille Vincent

“Sometimes we stumble. And that’s OK. Doing this work, talking about race and the problems we still face today because of the sins of the past, is hard. You’re going to stick your foot in your mouth. You’re going to make mistakes. The important thing is to learn from them. Figure out what worked and what didn’t. Then do more of what worked! And then go make a better mistake tomorrow.”

John Rudy

“Telling good stories is the heart of an interpreter and in order to do that, know your audiences, yourself, and your story.” Will you struggle? Yes, you will, but with practice and practice you will succeed.

Rufai Sharfow

“Our history does not rest in the textbooks of our classrooms, but rather, it is alive in the places that we call National Park Service sites. We work within the pages of the text books that have never been written. Be the writer / interpreter that is dedicated to telling the whole history of our Nation.”

Carol McBryant



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Relevant & Contemporary Content

The past is not exclusively set in the past; the legacies of slavery, inequality, and exclusion resonate in the present and can be seen in today's headlines. What you read, listen, and watch could be potential material for your next tour.

This is a partial collection of resources that includes [Radio & Podcasts](#), [Short Videos](#), [Documentaries](#), and [News Stories](#). These are not endorsed by the National Park Service, but rather are a collection of known available resources that support the content of this discussion guide.

Radio & Podcasts:

[Confronting Racism \(NPR, TED Radio Hour\)](#)

Racism is not always obvious, but it can be found almost everywhere. TED speakers explore the effects of everyday and systemic racism in America, and how we can work to defeat it. Guests include authors Brittney Cooper and Monique Morris, journalism professor Pat Ferrucci, clinical psychologist Howard Stevenson, and anti-racism educator Travis Jones.

[Respect Yourself \(NPR Code Switch\)](#)

What does "civility" look like and who gets to define it? What about "respectable" behavior? In this episode, NPR Code Switch examines the public policing of behavior.

[Achy Breaky Charts \(Vox, Today Explained\)](#)

In the summer of 2019, "Old Town Road" became the most popular song in America, but not without sparking controversy in the music industry. Vox's Allegra Frank chronicles Lil Nas X's challenges with the charts and Charlie Harding, co-host of the "Switched on Pop" podcast, attempts to figure out what counts as country.



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Short Videos:

[Let's get to the root of racial injustice \(Megan Ming Francis, TEDxRainier\)](#)

In this inspiring and powerful talk, Megan Francis traces the root causes of our current racial climate to their core causes, debunking common misconceptions and calling out "fix-all" cures to a complex social problem

[The future of race in America \(Michelle Alexander, TEDxTalks\)](#)

Michelle Alexander served as the Director of the *Racial Justice Project* for the ACLU of Northern California, where she helped lead a national campaign against racial profiling by law enforcement. In this TEDxTalk she discusses race and gender discrimination in the legal system.

[The Disturbing History of the Suburbs \(Adam Ruins Everything, College Humor\)](#)

The show *Adam Ruins Everything* follows Adam Conover from College Humor as he takes on society's biggest misconceptions. In this episode, he discusses the history of "redlining" in America, the racist housing policy from the Jim Crow era that still impacts America today.

[The Dangers of Whitewashing Black History \(David Ikard, TEDxNashville\)](#)

Should white people care about the whitewashing of black history? Most people will likely answer yes to this question, if only because it sounds politically correct. What will hopefully become clear is that whites have as much to lose by whitewashing black history as their African American peers. This episode is presented by David Ikard, a Professor of African American and Diaspora Studies at Vanderbilt University.

Documentaries:

[Africans in America: America's Journey through Slavery \(Charles Johnson, PBS Documentary Series\)](#)

In this 1998 documentary, Charles Johnson chronicles the development of racial slavery in the English colonies, how the colonist fought for independence, as well as how the new African American leadership of free blacks and fugitive slaves emerged seeking full participation in



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American democracy. As the country expanded westward, the abolitionist movement and the issue of slavery polarized the nation and moved it toward civil war.

[13th \(Ava DuVernay, Netflix Documentary\)](#)

In this thought-provoking 2016 documentary, scholars, activists and politicians analyze the criminalization of African Americans and the U.S. prison boom amidst the War on Drugs. This documentary was nominated for an Academy Award for Best Documentary, and won the Primetime Emmy Award for Outstanding Documentary or Nonfiction Special.

[Eyes on the Prize \(Henry Hampton, PBS Documentary\)](#)

This landmark series, which first premiered in 1987, documents the history of the civil rights movement in America. Produced by Blackside, segments include the Montgomery bus boycott of 1954, school desegregation in 1957 Arkansas, the right-to-vote battle within Mississippi, the march from Selma to Montgomery, and the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

News Stories:

[Building the First Slavery Museum in America \(New York Times\)](#)

This article follows the story of the Whitney Plantation Museum's journey and formation, as well as how their approach to history differs from similar plantation museums in Louisiana.

[Confederate Statues Were Built To Further A 'White Supremacist Future' \(NPR\)](#)

"Most of the people who were involved in erecting the monuments were not necessarily erecting a monument to the past, but were rather, erecting them toward a white supremacist future."

[Why Aren't Stories Like '12 Years a Slave' Told at Southern Plantation Museums? \(Collectors Weekly\)](#)

Following the popularity of the film "12 Years a Slave," Lisa Hix ponders the absence of historic narratives centered on the enslaved.



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Annotated Bibliography

This is a partial collection of resources including topics on [Interpreting Slavery](#), the [History of Slavery and Abolition](#), [Primary Sources](#), [Systemic and Racialized Violence](#), as well as [Race and Identity](#). These are not endorsed by the National Park Service, but rather are a collection of known available resources that support the content of this discussion guide.

Interpreting Slavery:

Araujo, Ana Lucia. (2014) [Shadows of the Slave Past: Memory, Heritage, and Slavery](#). New York: Routledge.

This transnational and comparative study examines the processes that led to the memorialization of slavery and the Atlantic slave trade in the second half of the 20th century. Including global efforts in Europe, Africa, and the Americas, Araujo examines how different social actors of African descent, white elites, and national governments approached their slave histories, at times fighting to make it visible and at others concealing it in the public space.

Eichstedt, Jennifer L. and Stephen Small. (2002) [Representations of Slavery: Race and Ideology in Southern Plantation Museums](#). Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution.

This study explores how slavery is presented at public and private plantation museums in the American South. Touring over 100 plantation museums in Virginia, Georgia, and Louisiana, Eichstedt and Small's findings indicate that the experience and legacy of slavery is still inadequately represented within the national discourse surrounding race, racism, and identity.

Gallas, Kristin L. and James DeWolf Perry (eds.) (2015) [Interpreting Slavery at Museums and Historic Sites](#). *Interpreting History*. Lanham, MA: Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, Inc.

Book 5 of the *Interpreting History* series, this edited volume contains different case studies of sites across the United States that interpret America's slave past. This includes interpretive approaches to the collective conversation centering on slavery acknowledgment, criticism of the past, and acting in the present to develop inclusive narratives.

Horton, James Oliver & Lois E. Horton (eds.) (2008) [Slavery and Public History: The Tough Stuff of American Memory](#). The University of North Carolina Press.



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America's slave past remains a contentious issue in U.S. memory. Edited by noted historians James Oliver Horton and Lois E. Horton, this collection explores current controversies and offers bracing analysis of how people remember their past and how the lessons they draw influence American politics and culture today.

Stuckey, Sterling. (1987, 2013) Slave Culture: Nationalist Theory and the Foundations of Black America. Oxford University Press.

In this work, Stuckley examines the interactions of African peoples in southern plantations who achieved a common culture. From the slave trade to slavery in America, the Yorubas, Akans, Ibos, Angolans and others became a single people, fostering resistance before there was mention of natural rights. Stuckley presents on the fascinating profiles of David Walker, Henry Highland Garnet, and Frederick Douglass.

Thornton, John. (1992, 1998) Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400-1800. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Investigates Africa's involvement in the Atlantic world from the fifteenth through the eighteenth centuries, providing a new perspective on the causes and consequences of the slave trade in Africa, Europe, as well as the New World. Thornton provides a perspective illuminating Africa's economic and military strength that opened up opportunities for trade with Europe; the roles of Africans, and the reasoning for European colonization.

The History of Slavery and Abolitionism:

Aptheker, Herbert. (1943) American Negro Slave Revolts. Columbia University Press.

This book is a study of the African American slave revolts in the United States, showcasing evidence for the prevalence of rebellion and arguing against the myth of enslaved docility. This includes an examination of the rebellions led by Nat Turner, as well as those led by Denmark Vesey and Gabriel.

Cooper, William J. (1970-2012, 2019) Approaching Civil War and Southern History. LSU Press.

This collection ranges widely across a broad spectrum of subjects in Civil War and southern history. While many essays deal with author Cooper's well-known interests, such as Jefferson



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Davis or the secession crisis, others focus on lesser-known subjects such as Civil War artist Edwin Forbes and the writer Daniel R. Hundley.

Davis, David Brion. (2008) Inhuman Bondage: The Rise and Fall of Slavery in the New World. Oxford University Press.

This volume offers a compelling narrative that links together the profits of slavery, the pain of the enslaved, and the legacy of racism. It unveils a portrait of the dark side of the American dream. Yet it offers an inspiring example as well, the story of how abolitionists, barely a fringe group in the 1770s, successfully fought in the space of a hundred years to defeat one of human history's greatest evils.

Fehrenbacher, Don E. (2002) The Slaveholding Republic: An Account of the United States Government's Relations to Slavery. Ward M. McAfee (ed.) Oxford University Press.

In this volume, Fehrenbacher argues that the Constitution itself was more or less neutral on the issue of slavery and that, in the antebellum period, the idea that the Constitution protected slavery was hotly debated. He also argues that Lincoln's election was such a shock to the South that quickly evolved into a "Republican revolution" that ended the anomaly of the United States as a "slaveholding republic."

Finkelman, Paul (ed.) (2003) Defending Slavery: Proslavery Thought in the Old South: A Brief History with Documents. The Bedford Series in History and Culture. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's.

From the time of the Revolution until the Civil War and beyond, Southern thinkers offered a variety of pro-slavery arguments. This body of thought, based on religion, politics and law, economics, history, philosophy, expediency, and science, offers invaluable insights into how slavery shaped American history and continues to affect American society. In this volume, Paul Finkelman presents a representative selection of pro-slavery thought.

Franklin, John Hope. (1947) From Slavery to Freedom: A History of African Americans, 1st ed. New York: A.A. Knopf.

Franklin's ground-breaking work is considered to be the seminal text on African American history. This comprehensive account examines the history of African Americans from their origins on the African continent to their arrival in the West, tracing migration patterns, demographic changes, and the community's ongoing struggle for justice and racial equality.

Memmi, Albert. (1965) The Colonizer and the Colonized. The Orion Press, Inc.



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This timeless classic explores the psychological effects of colonialism on colonized and colonizers alike. It is an important document of our times, an invaluable warning for all future generations.

Pitcaithley, Dwight. (2018) [The U.S. Constitution and Secession: A Documentary Anthology of Slavery and White Supremacy](#). University Press of Kansas.

Five months after the election of Abraham Lincoln, the Confederates fired on Fort Sumter and the fight for the Union began in earnest. This documentary reader offers a firsthand look at the constitutional debates that consumed the country in those fraught five months. Day by day, week by week, these documents chart the political path, and the insurmountable differences, that led directly, but not inevitably, to the American Civil War.

Sinha, Manisha. (2016) [The Slave's Cause: A History of Abolition](#). Yale University Press.

Manisha examines how the Haitian Revolution and the centrality of slave resistance shaped the ideology and tactics of abolition. She places African Americans at the forefront of the narrative, recovering the role of African Americans in the march to abolishing slavery. These visionaries ultimately redefine America democracy and human rights across the globe.

Primary Sources:

Douglass, Frederick. (1841-1964) [Frederick Douglass Papers](#). [Library of Congress](#).

The Frederick Douglass Papers at the Library of Congress presents the papers of the nineteenth-century African American abolitionist who escaped from slavery and then risked his freedom by becoming an outspoken antislavery lecturer, writer, and publisher. This online collection, containing approximately 7,400 items (including 38,000 images), spans the years 1841 to 1964, with the bulk of the material dating from 1862 to 1865.

Douglas, Frederick. (1845, 2004) [Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass](#). Ingram.

A 19th century memoir on abolition written by the famous orator and former slave Frederick Douglass. With factual detail and moving prose, Douglas recounts the events of his life in a work that was considered one of the most influential pieces of literature to fuel the abolitionist movement of the early 19th century in the United States.



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Douglas, Frederick. (1852) The Meaning of July Fourth for the Negro (Speech). [PBS Thirteen](#).

In this moving speech, Frederick Douglas laid bare the national shame of slavery, disavowing the innate hypocrisy of celebrating the freedom of independence while denouncing the country's tyranny.

Franklin, John Hope & Loren Schweninger. (2006) In Search of the Promised Land: A Slave Family in the Old South. Oxford University Press.

The matriarch of a remarkable African American family, Sally Thomas went from being a slave on a tobacco plantation to a "virtually free" person who ran her own business and purchased one of her sons out of bondage. Based on personal letters and an autobiography by one of Thomas' sons, this work follows the family as they walk the boundary between slavery and freedom, traveling across the country in search of a "promised land."

J.W. Randolph & Co. (1861) Plantation and Farm Instruction, Regulation, Record, Inventory and Account Book. [University of Virginia Library](#).

This primary source, a Plantation and Farm Instruction, Regulation, Record, Inventory and Account Book, provides an example of the record keeping practices on slave plantations.

Jacobs, Harriet. (1861, 2001) Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl. Dover Publications.

Written and published in 1861 after Jacobs' harrowing escape from a vile and predatory master, this memoir delivers a powerful and unflinching portrayal of the abuses and hypocrisy of the master-slave relationship. Jacobs writes frankly of the horrors she suffered as a slave, her eventual escape after several unsuccessful attempts, and her seven years in self-imposed exile, hiding in a coffin-like "garret" attached to her grandmother's porch.

Northrup, Solomon. (1853, 2013) Twelve Years a Slave. Eakin Films & Publishing.

This is a memoir of a man born free in New York, kidnapped in Washington, D.C., sold into slavery, and kept in bondage for 12 years in Louisiana. Northrup recounts the slave markets of D.C. and New Orleans, as well as his experiences with chattel slavery on major cotton and sugar plantations in the Deep South.

Walker, David. (1826) David Walker's Appeal.



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David Walker's work, in four articles along with a preamble, was written to arm African Americans in the U.S. with information to empower them to not allow themselves to be subjected to the morbid conditions of slavery. This work is known as one of the most radical anti-slavery documents because of the emotions and actions it stirred.

Washington, Booker T. (1901, 2000) Up From Slavery. Signet Classics.

This 1901 autobiography detailed Booker T. Washington's personal experiences with working to rise from the position of a slave child during the Civil War, the difficulties and obstacles he overcame to get an education at the new Hampton University, as well as his work establishing vocational schools, most notably the Tuskegee Institute in Alabama, to help black people and other disadvantaged minorities learn useful, marketable skills.

Wheatley, Phillis. (1773) Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral. A. Bell.

This colonial era collection of poetry is one of the earliest firsthand accounts of slavery written by an African American. Wheatley's work was harshly criticized by many of her time, including Thomas Jefferson, and even after emancipation she died in poverty and obscurity. Much of Wheatley's poetry centers on (tragic) events of her lived experience, from which she draws a greater celestial understanding to better comprehend both her own and others' suffering.

Systemic and Racialized Violence:

Alexander, Michelle. (2012) The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness. The New Press.

In this incisive critique, former litigator-turned-legal-scholar Michelle Alexander provocatively argues that we have not ended the Jim Crow era racial caste in America: we have simply redesigned it as mass incarceration. Alexander shows that by targeting black men and decimating communities of color the U.S. criminal justice system functions as a contemporary system of racial control, even as it formally adheres to the principle of color blindness.

Coates, Ta-Nehisi. (2015) Between the World and Me. Spiegel & Grau.

Inspired by Baldwin's *The Fire Next Time*, Ta-Nehisi Coates writes to his young son what it means to be black in the United States. Written poignantly as a father, Coates urgently



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explores the idea of “race,” a falsehood that damages all Americans but falls most heavily on the bodies of black women and men, bodies exploited through slavery and segregation, and today, threatened, locked up, and disproportionately murdered.

DeGury, Joy. (2017) Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome: America’s Legacy of Enduring Injury and Healing. Joy Degruy Publications Inc.

In this volume, DeGury explores African American attitudes, assumptions, and behaviors through the lens of history to yield a greater understanding of how centuries of slavery and oppression have impacted people of African descent in America. *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome* offers a glimpse into the evolution of society's beliefs, feelings, attitudes, and behavior concerning race in America.

King Jr., Dr. Martin Luther. (1964, 2000) Why We Can’t Wait. Signet.

Reflecting on the U.S. civil rights achievements during 1963, the centennial year of the Emancipation Proclamation, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. writes with elegance and urgency on the necessity of taking direct, nonviolent action to pragmatically change both American laws and minds.

Morris, Monique. (2016) Pushout: The Criminalization of Black Girls in Schools. The New Press.

Dr. Morris introduces the school-to-prison-pipeline and the effects it has on African American female students. She argues through a collection of longitudinal studies and statistics that zero-tolerance policies subjects African American girl students to major trouble for minor infractions, often times feeding them right into the criminal justice system.

Rothstein, Richard. (2017) The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America. Liveright.

In this book, Rothstein argues with exacting precision and insight how segregation in America, the incessant kind that continues to infect our major cities and has contributed to so much recent social strife, is the byproduct of explicit government policies at the local, state, and federal levels.

Stevenson, Bryan. (2015) Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption. Spiegel & Grau.

Bryan Stevenson is an influential lawyer and Founder of the *Equal Justice Initiative*. In this book, he shares his perspective on the role of mercy in our criminal justice system. From



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establishing his legal practice dedicated to servicing the poor, wrongly condemned, and those who cannot escape the system's punitive weight, he works to reform, enhance, and repeal laws that racially target people of color in the United States.

Woodward, C. Vann. (2008) *The Burden of Southern History*. LSU Press.

The Burden of Southern History remains one of the essential history texts of our time. In it Woodward addresses the interrelated themes of southern identity, southern distinctiveness, and the strains of irony that characterize much of the South's historical experience. First published in 1960, the book quickly became a touchstone for generations of students.

Race and Identity:

Anderson, Carol. (2016) *White Rage: The Truth about America's Racial Divide*. Bloomsbury USA. 1st Edition.

Since 1865 and the passage of the 13th Amendment, Anderson argues that every time African Americans have made advances towards full participation in our democracy, white reaction has fueled a deliberate and relentless rollback of their gains. This book aims to pull back the veil that has long covered actions made in the name of protecting democracy, fiscal responsibility, or protection against fraud, rendering visible the long lineage of white rage.

Baldwin, James. (1963) *The Fire Next Time*. New York: Vintage Books.

A powerful evocation of James Baldwin's early life in Harlem, as well as a disturbing examination of the consequences of racial injustice, this national bestseller is an intensely personal and provocative assessment of America that passionately galvanized the emerging civil rights movement.

Coates, Ta-Nehisi. (2017) *We Were Eight Years in Power: An American Tragedy*. New York: One World.

Drawing on iconic essays Coates first published in *The Atlantic* spanning the 8 years of Obama's presidency, this curated collection includes Coates' commentary on the (un)changing race relations of the period leading up to the election of America's "first white president."



400 Years: Discussing Slavery, Freedom, & Race in America

DuBois, W.E.B. (1903, 1994) [The Souls of Black Folks](#). Dover Publications.

This book contains several essays on race, including some previously published in the *Atlantic Monthly*. To develop this work, DuBois drew from his own experiences as an African American in American society. Outside of its notable relevance in African American history, *The Souls of Black Folk* also holds an important place in social science as one of the early works in the field of sociology.

Dyson, Michael Eric. (2017) [Tears We Cannot Stop: A Sermon to White America](#). St. Martin's Press.

In this book, Dyson argues that if we are to make real racial progress we must face difficult truths, including being honest about how black grievance has been ignored, dismissed, and even discounted. Dyson writes in the spirit of a sermon, appealing to white Americans to recognize the various ways in which both institutional and individual racism impact ALL of us.

Kendall, Frances E. (2013) [Understanding White Privilege: Creating Pathways to Authentic Relationships across Race](#). New York and London: Routledge. Second Edition.

Privilege exists on the opposite side of the same coin as prejudice, and as such is absolutely necessary for understanding racial injustice. In this volume, Frances Kendall explores different levels of privilege, how to approach this emotionally charged topic in discussion, and encourages readers to reflect on how race impacts their lives and others.

Kendi, Ibram X. (2017) [Stamped from the Beginning: The Definitive History of Racist Ideas in America](#). Bold Type Books. Reprint Edition.

In this book, Kendi argues that if we have any hope of grappling with this stark reality of racism, we must first understand how racist ideas develop, are disseminated and enshrined in American society.

Larsen, Kate Clifford. (2004) [Bound for the Promised Land: Harriet Tubman: Portrait of an American Hero](#). One World.

Stripping away myths and misconceptions, Larson presents stunning new details about Tubman's accomplishments, personal life, and influence, including her relationship with Frederick Douglass, her involvement with John Brown's raid on Harpers Ferry, and revelations about a young woman who may have been Tubman's daughter.



400 Years: Discussing Slavery, Freedom, & Race in America

Painter, Nell Irvin. (2010) The History of White People. New York; London: W. W. Norton & Company.

In this comprehensive racial history of the United States, Dr. Nell Irvin Painter investigates the changing lines for inclusion in American identity as they shifted with the cultural construct of being racially “white.” She eloquently demonstrates how the origins of American identity in the 18th century were intrinsically tied to the elevation of white skin as the embodiment of beauty, power, and intelligence.

Steele, Shelby. (2007) White Guilt: How Blacks and Whites Together Destroyed the Promise of the Civil Rights Movement. Harper Perennial. Reprint Edition.

Steele suggests that the age of white supremacy in the United States has given birth to white guilt and argues that such a feeling/expressive state is neither good for African Americans nor psychologically healthy for White Americans.

West, Cornel. (1994) Race Matters. Vintage Books.

In this essay collection, Dr. Cornel West addresses a number of issues concerning black Americans including: the LA riots following the Rodney King verdict, Malcolm X, Clarence Thomas and Anita Hill, as well as black street life. Both timely and timeless, these essays represent the continuing struggle to include African Americans in mainstream American political, economic, and social life, without losing a unique culture to hegemony.