

Subversive History: Learning the Past to Act in the Now

“History should be a subversive act because what it does is reframe a discussion not only about the past, but about the future.”

Manning Marable, 2006

Across the country, people are being told to educate themselves about the history of racism in the United States in order to become more effective allies in the struggle for racial justice. This syllabus—designed as an 8-week learning experience to be done with a group—seeks to help interested people become better informed about America’s history of anti-blackness and white supremacy, with the ultimate goal of helping them become more effective community leaders in the fight against racism.

Week 1: Why is it so hard for white people to talk about race?

[Introductory section](#) and [“Whiteness”](#) Topic from the “Talking about Race” website of the National Museum of African American History. Be sure to watch the video by Robin DiAngelo that is on this website and to explore the chart, “Aspects and Assumptions of White Culture”

Ijeoma Oluo, “What if I Talk about Race Wrong” in [So You Want to Talk about Race](#) (Hachette Book Group, 2019), pp. 37-52.

“Everything You Need to Know about White Fragility,” *Medical News Today*, June 12, 2020, <https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/white-fragility-definition>

Week 2: When did racism begin? Where did “race” come from?

“The Invention of Race,” Center for Documentary Studies, audio documentary, <https://beta.prx.org/stories/218457>

“Historical Foundations of Race,” website of the National Museum of African American History, <https://nmaahc.si.edu/learn/talking-about-race/topics/historical-foundations-race>

Alan Goodman, “Two Questions About Race,” June 7, 2006, on the website raceandgenomics.ssrc.org, <http://raceandgenomics.ssrc.org/Goodman/>

*If you want to dig deeper: Barbara Fields, “Slavery, Race and Ideology in the United States of America,” *New Left Review* 181(May/June 1990): 95-118.*

Week 3: How central was slavery to the American economic and political system?

Edward Baptist, The Half Has Never Been Told: Slavery and American Capitalism (Basic Books, 2014), Introduction, pp. xiii-xxvii.

Anne Farrow, Joel Lang, and Jennifer Frank, Complicity: How the North Promoted, Prolonged, and Profited from Slavery (Ballantine Books, 2006), Preface, Introduction and Afterword, xxv-, 215-217.

“The Economy that Slavery Built,” 1619 Project Podcast, 31 minutes, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/01/23/podcasts/1619-podcast.html>

Week 4: What was the reality of slavery for both blacks and whites?

Heather Williams, Help Me to Find My People: The African American Search for Family After Slavery (UNC Press, 2012), Epilogue, pp. 190-200

Thavolia Glymph, “Beyond the Limits of Decency: Women in Slavery” in Out of the House of Bondage (Cambridge University Press, Chapter 2, pp. 32-62

12 Years a Slave (2013 feature film), available to rent for \$3.99 on Amazon Prime or [YouTube](#)

If you want to dig deeper: Nell Painter, “Soul Murder and Slavery: Toward a Fully Loaded Cost Accounting” in U.S. History as Women’s History (UNC Press, 1995), 125-146

Week 5: What happened after the Civil War?

Equal Justice Initiative, “Reconstruction in America: Racial Violence After the Civil War” (2020), read pp. 6-34; 82-105, <https://eji.org/report/reconstruction-in-america/>

“What was Jim Crow?” Jim Crow Museum of Racist Memorabilia, <https://www.ferris.edu/jimcrow/what.htm>

Ethnic Notions (film available to rent for \$2.99 via [Vimeo](#))

Clay Cane, “Not Just Tulsa: Five Other Race Massacres that Devastated Black America,” 2020, <https://www.bet.com/news/national/2019/12/17/not-just-tulsa--five-other-race-massacres-that-devastated-black.html>.

If you want to dig deeper: Ruth Thompson Miller, Joe R. Feagin and Leslie Picca, Jim Crow’s Legacy: The Lasting Impact of Racial Segregation (Rowman and Littlefield, 2015), Chapter 3, pp. 35-67.

Week 6: How have government policies created and deepened racial inequality?

Ira Katznelson, "White Veterans Only" in When Affirmative Action Was White: An Untold History of Racial Inequality in 20th Century America (W.W. Norton, 2005), pp. 113-141.

Ta-Nehisi Coates, "The Case for Reparations," *The Atlantic*, June 2014, https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2014/06/the-case-for-reparations/361631/?utm_source=share&utm_campaign=share

Interview with Michelle Alexander, "Jim Crow Still Exists in America," *Fresh Air*, National Public Radio, January 16, 2012, <https://www.npr.org/2012/01/16/145175694/legal-scholar-jim-crow-still-exists-in-america>.

Explore website "Mapping Inequality: Redlining in New Deal America," <https://dsl.richmond.edu/panorama/redlining/#loc=5/39.1/-94.58&text=intro>

Week 7: Why didn't the civil rights movement end racism or lead to a "post-racial" society?

George Lipsitz, "Law and Order: Civil Rights Laws" in The Possessive Investment in Whiteness, pp. 25-46.

Carol Anderson, "Rolling Back Civil Rights" in White Rage: The Unspoken Truth of Our Racial Divide (Bloomsbury, 2016), pp. 98-137.

Megan Ming Francis, "Let's Get to the Root of Racial Injustice," TEDxRanier, 2016, <https://youtu.be/-aCn72iXO9s>

Week 8: How can this knowledge help you become an anti-racist advocate?

"Being Anti-Racist" Topic from the National Museum of African American History website, <https://nmaahc.si.edu/learn/talking-about-race/topics/being-antiracist>

Ijeoma Oluo, "Talking is Great, but What Else Can I do?" in So You Want to Talk about Race? (Seal Press, 2018), pp. 225-238.

The Movement for Black Lives, "A Vision for Black Lives: Policy Demands for Black Power, Freedom, and Justice," 2016