### Equity, Critical Race Theory and Antiracism Packet

The following is a series of book excerpts and web sources dedicated to specific topics representing the aforementioned subjects as potential course materials. I have arranged the topics chronologically and added personal response and research questions to each excerpt. I left the document in Word so that instructors can modify the content to suit their own course objectives.

**Table of Contents**

1. **Deborah Miranda – *Bad Indians: A Tribal Memoir* (Indigenous Californians)**
2. **The Black Codes (Legal Discrimination)**
3. **Nancy Isenberg – *White Trash: The 400-Year Old Untold History of Class in America* (The Civil War)**
4. **Ta-Nehisi Coates – *We Were Eight Years in Power: An American Tragedy* (Reconstruction)**
5. **Yuchen Qin – *The Diplomacy of Nationalism: The Six Companies and China’s Policy Toward Exclusion* (Sinophobia)**
6. **Hilary Moss - *Schooling Citizens: The Struggle for African American Education in Antebellum America* (Race Exclusion in Education)**
7. **David Ortiz – *An African-American and Latinx History of the United States*, Howard Zinn – *A People’s History of the United States*, Ta-Nehisi Coates – *We Were Eight Years in Power: An American Tragedy* (The New Deal)**
8. **Howard Zinn – *A People’s History of the United States* (Civil Rights Protests)**
9. **Latin America**
10. **Jonathan Haidt – *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People Are Divided by Politics and Religion* (Cultural Norms / Morality)**
11. **Arlie Hochschild – *Strangers in Their Own Land: Anger and Mourning on the American Right* (Community / Government)**
12. **Alethia Jones, Virginia Eubanks, and Barbara Smith – *Ain’t Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me Around: Forty Years of Movement Building With Barbara Smith* (Education / Childhood Exclusion / Capitalism / Representation / Coalition-Building / The Status Quo)**
13. **Textbooks**
14. **Howard Zinn – *A People’s History of the United States***, **George Packer –** ***The Unwinding: An Inner History of the New America*****(Wealth Allocation)**
15. **Modern Racism and Political Support**
16. **Voter Suppression**
17. **Nicole Chung – *All You Can Ever Know: A Memoir* (Transracial Adoption)**
18. **Garrard Conley – *Boy Erased: A Memoir of Identity, Faith, and Family* (Homophobia)**
19. **Wesley Yang – *The Souls of Yellow Folk: Essays* (Family / Culture)**
20. **Arno Michaelis and Pardeep Singh Kaleka – *The Gift of Our Wounds: A Sikh and a Former White Supremacist Find Forgiveness After Hate* (Cultural Isolation)**
21. **Jessa Crispin – *Why I Am Not a Feminist: A Feminist Manifesto* (Patriarchal Values / Consumptionism)**
22. **Jessa Crispin – *Why I Am Not a Feminist; A Feminist Manifesto*,Tara Westover – *Educated: A Memoir*, Reyna Grande – *A Dream Called Home* (Wealth, Activism, and Personal Goals)**
23. **Sonia Nieto – *Finding Joy in Teaching Students of Diverse Backgrounds: Culturally Responsive and Socially Just Practices in U.S. Classrooms* (Education)**
24. **Tara Westover – *Educated: A Memoir* (Independence)**
25. **Reyna Grande – *A Dream Called Home* (Mentorship)**
26. **Puente Students’ Responses to Jamaica Kincaid’s “Girl” (Gender Roles)**
27. **Suicide**
28. **Isabel Wilkerson – *Caste, the Origins of Our Discontent* (Racism)**
29. **Mara Lee Grayson – *Teaching Racial Literacy: Reflective Practices for Critical Writing* (Structural Racism)**
30. **Deborah Miranda – *Bad Indians: A Tribal Memoir* (Indigenous Californians)**

Many people might be surprised to know how badly California Indians were treated; how brutal their subjugation and enslavement were, and how quickly their population was diminished to practically nothing. People will also be surprised to know how much of this was aided and abetted by state and federal governments. In 1849 news that gold was in California began to spread; in 1850, California became a state, and being a state in the American territory meant diminishing economic opportunities for nonwhites and brutally subjugating, in many cases annihilating, their existing populations. Regarding California Indians, we see government-sponsored genocide. “In 1851 and 1852,” Miranda says, “Congress appropriated and paid out over one million dollars in bounties to white men who harvested Indian scalps from the California goldfields – scalps taken from men, women, and children by men eager to make easy money” (45). She quotes an educator who says “at one point it was something in the neighborhood of $25 for a male body part, whether it was a scalp, a hand, or the whole body and then $5 for a child or woman” (45). California would soon carry out policies similar to that of the U.S. Congress. “In 1857,” for example, “the California State Legislature issued bonds for $410,000 for the ‘suppression of Indian hostilities’ [and] approved over $1 million in such bounties” (46). That’d be like the state of California announcing today that part of its annual budget would include, for one year only, $28 million for the slaughter of natives, with $700 paid out for each male body part, and $150 for the body part of a woman or child. And that’s on top of the $28 million the federal government invested in the state for the same purpose five and six years earlier, in today’s dollars.

In addition to bounties placed on their heads by state and federal government, land theft was prevalent, if not rampant. At times, white men would confiscate lands Indians legally owned, “simply occupying Indian land, or placing armed guards there, until finally the Indians were forced to abandon it” (200). When these displaced Indians took their paperwork to courts seeking redress, “the justice system ignored these and most other thefts of property from Native people, even when they had acquired the property legally” (201).

Mass enslavement of the California Indian was also the norm at this time. The epicenter was the mission system, but that doesn’t represent the totality of it. “Many Indians had been enslaved to work in the gold rush camps of whites,” Miranda tells us, “including the infamous John Sutter of Sutter’s Mill” (46). In 1844, one of Sutter’s managers wrote in a letter, “The Indians of California make as obedient and humble slaves as the Negro in the south. For a mere trifle you can secure their services for life” (46). Slavery also included the selling off of young girls, who were “bought up by single men, for about a hundred dollars apiece [about $3,500 today]” (46). And other women were subject to sexual assault. Thirty-four percent of Indian women were raped, Miranda writes, “and ninety percent of the rapists are non-Indian” (23). This helped spread “the chronic syphilis that plagues California Indians, a ‘legacy’ of soldiers that also decimated Indian women’s fertility” (65).

According to an 1865 article in the *California Police Gazette*, “Indians were still being held ‘as slaves were held in the South’” (47). Even after the Civil War, and the abolishment of slavery, “In 1866 a special investigator for the commissioner of Indian Affairs found that Indian slavery was ‘not uncommon’ in California” (47). Miranda writes that “most white households throughout the state had at least one Indian slave, and often several” (46).

Famine also plagued these California Indians, via the depletion or theft of their resources. “Slavery and murder were bad enough,” Miranda writes, “but thousands more Indians simply starved to death as their food resources were devoured by miners or trashed by gold mining” (47). These conditions all combined to make California Indians practically extinct in a very short period of time. Miranda writes that “In 1877 it had been 107 years since Junipero Serra founded [the mission] San Carlos Borromeo del río Carmelo. From a pre-missionization population estimated as high as one million, California Indians now numbered about twenty thousand” (74). 98% of the population gone, in just over a century.

This leads to her discussion of a staple of California’s public education system, the mission project. Miranda references how California elementary schools make students do these projects in fourth grade. She tells us that in California’s public school systems, “Intense pressure is put upon students (and their parents) to create a ‘Mission Project’ that glorifies the era and glosses over both Spanish and Mexican exploitation of Indians, as well as American enslavement of those Indians” (xvii). She calls it “a lesson in Imperialism, racism, and manifest destiny” (xvii), as well as an effort to sustain a false history, one which conceals the true fate of California Indians. This is a historical thing: consider a portrait offered up in an 1877 *Harper’s Weekly* article, which describes them as “obedient, hardworking, unambitious mission drones whom the Spanish and Mexican padres had painstakingly trained to do some of the lowest, most labor-intensive chores of the era” (63).

On the contrary, Miranda writes, a Spanish mission was not a cooperative of labor, or the efficient and skillful utilization of a simple people, but rather something that “was meant to suck in Indigenous peoples, strip them of religion, language, and culture, and melt them down into generic workers instilled with Catholicism, Spanish values, and freshly overhauled, tuned-up souls” (16). Many people who ran the missions reported problems with the Indians they enslaved, such as “Unexpected physical and psychological resistance to conversion (rebellion, murder, self-destructive behaviors, chronic depression, and a catastrophically low birth rate) by Indigenous people as well as unforeseen biological reactions to the introduction of European foods, plants and animals, diseases” (16). The treatment was brutal. According to Junipero Serra, soldiers at these missions “would catch an Indian woman with their lassos to become prey for their unbridled lust. At times some Indian men would try to defend their wives, only to be shot down with bullets…even the children who came to the mission were not safe from their baseness” (21). Indians were beaten with all kinds of weapons, one of which was a device called “the cat-o’-nine tails,” known as “a breeding ground for disease and pestilence…the sores on Indians’ bodies would become badly infected” (14).

Miranda essentially depicts a mission as a place of genocide, and argues it should be regarded as such, because that’s how they are situated in the histories and experiences of California Indians. “Can you imagine teaching about slavery in the South,” she writes, “while simultaneously requiring each child to lovingly construct a plantation model, complete with happy darkies in the fields, white master, overseers with whips, and human auctions? Or asking fourth graders to study the Holocaust by carefully designing detailed concentration camps, complete with gas chambers, heroic Nazi guards, crematoriums?” (xvii). In her introduction, she says, “it’s time for the Mission Fantasy Fairy Tale to end” (xix); at the end of her book, she asks, “haven’t we lived under the burden of California mission mythology and gold rush fantasy long enough?” (208).

**Personal Response Prompt: Do you feel certain “histories” are excluded from public life? From education? What are they, and why are they excluded?**

**Research Prompt: Look more deeply into the history of California’s indigenous population. What is their presence today? How do they feel about their representations in history? In contemporary society? Another prompt is to research indigenous populations in other American states. What do you find in your research?**

1. **The Black Codes**

Do you know what the Black Codes are? They originated before the Civil War and were prevalent in

both the North and South. Early on, these “codes” were about restricting slaves’ rights, and reducing penalties for punishing them. Later, though, they’d be employed to place restrictions on freed blacks in nearly all American states.

In 1870, black men were granted the right to vote, largely as recompense for their participation as Union soldiers in the Civil War. But most lived in the South, and many whites in the South didn’t react very well to this new political empowerment. That said, to a large extent *all* territories were in on the effort to resist the empowerment voting rights gave black men. This changed the nature of the Black Codes.

Depending on the state, after the Civil War the Black Codes would stipulate black Americans

* could not assemble in groups
* could not bear arms
* could not learn to read or write
* could not exercise free speech
* could not testify against white people in court [black women, like white women, could not testify against white men they’d had children with]
* black orphans and dependents were made available to work for whites for free, often forced into apprenticeship until twenty-one for males, eighteen for females
* could not participate in several trades and businesses [making or selling liquor were two, and the sale of agricultural products was typically very restricted; in some states, like South Carolina, black people had to get permission to operate *any* business, and in that state the permission needed to be updated annually by a judge]
* had restrictions on their ability to own property
* needed licenses to do business with whites
* were forbidden to settle, marry, or sign contracts

And there was one “Code” *all* the slave states agreed on: banning marriage between white and

black people. Three of the “free” states, Indiana, Illinois, and Michigan, did the same. Speaking of

Illinois, The Illinois Black Code of 1853 prohibited any black person from outside of the state from residing there for more than ten days.

**Personal Response Prompt: Do you see this type of treatment – double standards and sanctioned discrimination – in the world today? In America?**

**Research Prompt: Pick an American state, and research its history of Black Codes. What did you find? Were restrictions placed on other races?**

1. **Nancy Isenberg – *White Trash: The 400-Year Old Untold History of Class in America* (The Civil War)**

In 1851, when he was still a senator from Mississippi, (he would later be the president of the Confederate States, from 1861-1865), Jefferson Davis said “no white man, in a slaveholding community, was the menial servant of anyone” (157). James Henry Hammond, who Isenberg calls “South Carolina’s leading proslavery intellectual” and who owned more than 300 slaves, argued to the U.S. Senate in 1858 “the South had made the right choice in keeping Africa-descended slaves in this lowly station,” because, in his own words, “there must be a class to do the menial duties, to perform the drudgery of life” (157). According the Isenberg, Texas secessionist Louis T. Wigfall, a Confederate States Senator, opposing the enlistment of black soldiers to fight for the Confederacy, believed “slaves were born servants, and raising them up by making them soldiers disrupted the entire class structure. Protecting that racial and class system was why southerners had seceded” (159).

**Personal Response Prompt: Do you feel like certain races or groups of people are considered**

**second-tier, or lesser members of society? Who? Why is this? Who sees them and characterizes**

**them in this way?**

**Research Prompt: Research people from this era (or modern-day historians) who argue that the ongoing subjugation of black people was the primary cause for the Civil War. Does anyone argue this was *not* the primary reason for the Civil War? Who?**

During the Civil War, in New York City’s *Atlantic Monthly*, one writer arguing for abolition wrote, “why should government ‘disenfranchise the humble, quiet, hardworking negro’ and leave the North

vulnerable to the vote of the ‘worthless barbarian’ – the ‘ignorant, illiterate, and vicious’ poor white?” (180).

**Personal Response Prompt: Can you find historical and modern-day examples of Americans speaking with disdain for poor white people? Why is this? What are stereotypes of poor white people?**

**Research Prompt: Look for historical and modern-day examples of poor whites being characterized as ignorant, racist, and backwards. Who gives this criticism? What is the response?**

1. **Ta-Nehisi Coates – *We Were Eight Years in Power: An American Tragedy* (Reconstruction)**

The title of Coates’ book refers to a brief post-Civil War period in which black men, who had been given the right to vote in 1870, began to accumulate political power through the ballot. According to the article “Black Americans and the Right to Vote” from the National Archives (archives.org), “The Reconstruction era was noteworthy in that African American men were not only granted voting rights but even won several seats in Congress. Hiram Revels and Blanche Bruce became the first African Americans to be elected to the U.S. Senate, representing the state of Mississippi.”

This was met with a fierce backlash, particularly in the South. The article goes on to state that “After their terms in office the next Black person elected to the Senate was Edward Brooke of Massachusetts, nearly a century later in 1967. When Reconstruction collapsed with the withdrawal of Federal troops from the former Confederate states in 1877, the white supremacist wing of the Democratic Party dominated the South. Voting rights for Black men in the former Confederate states were rescinded in courts and in state and local laws, and those rights were further restricted by poll taxes, literacy tests, intimidation, and fraud.”

Here are some quotes from the essay “The Negroes’ Temporary Farewell: Jim Crow and the Exclusion of African Americans from Congress, 1887–1929,” taken from the website of the United States House of Representatives:

“In the decade after the 1876 presidential election, the Republican-dominated state governments in the South [remember: back then Republicans were the “liberal” party], which had provided the basis for black political participation during Reconstruction, were undermined by former Confederates and their sympathizers who rebuilt the Democratic Party and seized control of southern state governments by brutally suppressing black voters and eliminating the power of the Republican Party below the Mason-Dixon line.

By the 1890s, most African Americans had either been barred from or abandoned electoral politics as extralegal violence and economic reprisals became a constant threat.

Virtually all the political advances afforded freedmen during Reconstruction were rolled back and eradicated during the years after 1890. In the South, the races were separated even more systematically and rigidly than during slavery.”

**Personal Response Prompt: Have you ever observed instances of people cheating to win something? What was at stake? What did they do? Were they successful?**

**Research Prompt: Can you find more on this topic of white Americans working to eliminate the political power black Americans were beginning to acquire at this time? How about other past and present examples of people “playing dirty” to prevent others from gaining political power? What are they?**

1. **Yuchen Qin: *The Diplomacy of Nationalism: The Six Companies and China’s Policy Toward***

***Exclusion* (Sinophobia)**

As California followed America into a deep Recession in the 1870s, people in positions of influence fanned the flames of public anger against Chinese immigrants. For example, California Senator James Augustus Johnson said in 1870 the Chinese were “a multitude bearing pestilence in their garments and seeping with filth and decay,” and another California Senator, Aaron Sargent, said in 1876, “feuds among the Chinese are frequent and notorious. Can we stand all the vices, all the diseases, all the mischief that infect humanity the world over and retain our American civilization?” Nevada Senator John Percival said in 1878 “They corrupt our youth with their vices” (62).

But it should be noted that the vilification of the Chinese had a legacy that was entrenched decades

before the anti-Chinese hysteria of the 1870s and 1880s. In 1853, California Governor Leland Stanford, speaking about Chinese immigrants, said “There can be no doubt that the presence among us of numbers of a degraded and distinct people must exercise a deleterious influence upon the superior race, and to a certain extent repel desirable immigration” (44). In 1865, the *New York Times* published an editorial which opined “if there were to be a flood-tide of Chinese population – a population befouled with all the social vices, with no knowledge or appreciation of free institution or constitutional liberty…we should be prepared to bid farewell to republicanism and democracy” (44). This editorial didn’t list an author, suggesting it was the consensus of the paper; the quote is part of the concluding sentence.

Resentment of the Chinese grew stronger with the declining economy, and newspapers and politicians helped to fuel the anger. The *New York Herald*, discussing a congressional committee sent to California in 1876 to investigate the “Chinese problem,” claimed the report confirmed “authentic and incontestable truth of what has been so often related to the beastliness, the filth, squalor, leprosy, venereal diseases, the lawlessness, perjury and violence, the corruption of youth and injury to the laboring classes that make the Chinese quarter of San Francisco a huge festering ulcer which is eating into the morals of the country” (61). In the 1870s and 1880s, anti-immigration feelings became so intense people began throwing rocks at Chinese arriving on the wharf, and police officers trying to intervene also became targets. By the 1880s, “a movement to boycott the employment of Chinese and the purchase of goods they made was spreading” throughout California (99). The Six Companies, a San Francisco-based organization that was responsible for, among other things, helping Chinese immigrate to America, began trying to halt immigration from China. Qin writes that they “called on all the Chinese in San Francisco to write letters to China deterring others from trying to come” and “As new tides of Sinophobia swept across the country in the 1870s, urgent dispatches replaced the slow, mildly toned letters of the 1850s and 1860s” (79). In 1876 Li Ming Hou, a senior member of the Six Companies, wrote a letter to Ou Eliang, the Chinese education commissioner in the United States, “to stop further emigration to America of its nationals, fearing mob violence on [San Francisco’s] Embarcadero when so-called coolie ships arrived” (80). Qin notes that the Six Companies sent so many letters to China, officials began to get annoyed and ignore them.

A quick note on demographics. In 1870, about 39 million people lived in America. California, with a population of 560,247 according to the 1870 federal census, was the 22nd most populous state [out of 37]. The same census showed 63,199 Chinese were living in America. For context, there were 33,589,377 whites at this time. From 1870-1880, the Chinese population would triple, which contributed to the hysteria of the late 1870s / early 1880s. But even then, the Chinese were most likely about one half of one percent of the U.S. population.

All of this anger toward the Chinese culminated in the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act, which banned

all Chinese immigration and represented the first time in American history that an entire race of people was banned. Originally designed to last ten years, the ban was extended until 1943 via one piece of legislation or another, and racial barriers for immigrants were not completely removed until the passing of the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, which abolished uneven restrictions on areas from which people could immigrate.

**Personal Response Prompt: Can you think of examples of people in positions of leadership**

**indulging in racist scapegoating? How about finding people to blame for economic conditions? Or both?**

**Research Prompt: Look into the history of public treatment of the Chinese at this time. Also,**

**research how the Chinese Exclusion Act existed in one form or another for about 80 years. Why was it finally repealed? Did you find out anything about immigration policies regarding other groups?**

One feature of anti-Chinese hysteria was mob violence. To a degree, the Chinese were always

targets of hostility. In an 1876 complaint to H.H. Ellis, San Francisco’s Chief of Police, the Six

Companies argued Chinese immigrants were frequently assaulted in the streets, and that “The assaulting party is seldom arrested…but if a Chinaman resists the assault he is frequently arrested and punished by fine or by imprisonment” (78). An 1864 editorial in the *San Francisco Chronicle* protested that no laws

existed to help bring to justice men who beat a Chinese merchant to death and dumped his body

about a mile from his store (43). But the riots were an escalation of this violence. A series of them occurred in the 1870s and 1880s throughout America; Qin notes that in one 1886 riot “more than forty Chinese were killed, and over $500,000 of property was damaged [about $14 million today]. The Chinese once again had become the scapegoats in California for the industrial upheavals that racked the nation in the mid-1880s,” in essence another economic depression, this one largely from lucrative mines like the Comstock Lode in Nevada scaling down their operations (110).

The riots were happening everywhere. An earlier example, which shows the reach of this hostility,

was “On October 31, 1880” when “a serious anti-Chinese riot took place in Denver, Colorado. As a

result of a mob attack, a Chinese laborer Look Young was killed, many others were wounded, and

property with an estimated value over $50,000 [$1.4 million] was destroyed” (116). In his book *A People’s History of the United States*, historian Howard Zinn tells us that “In Rock Springs, Wyoming, in the summer of 1885, whites attacked five hundred Chinese miners, massacring twenty-eight of them in cold blood” (266).

Society operated in tangent with legislation that treated the Chinese as lesser citizens. This, too, had

a legacy: in 1853, just three years after being admitted to the union, California’s Supreme Court “set

a precedent that Chinese, like all nonwhite peoples, could not testify against whites” (27). In 1862,

“California passed legislation imposing a tax of $2.50 per month [$75 today], called the Chinese

Police Tax, on almost all Chinese living in California” [this one was appealed to the California

Supreme Court, and actually overturned] (48). In 1886, the Six Companies attempted to build a 100-

bed hospital in San Francisco that would offer free care to all Chinese; not only were they denied,

but “To make matters worse, the city health authorities closed down nearly all the other Chinese

medical facilities, but provided no alternative, and so Chinese patients were simply driven out into

the streets” (105).

**Personal Response Prompt: Do you see examples of mob violence today? Is it connected to race? Are groups of people targeted for violence? Do you see double standards in society – in**

**other words, different sets of rules for different people? Why is this, and what are the effects?**

**Research Prompt: Look into the history of racial violence in America. What groups have been**

**targeted? Does this continue today? Also, look into race-based discrimination. What examples**

**did you find? One other area is the 1870s recession in America. What was to blame for this economic downturn? Do you see evidence that Chinese immigrants were unfairly scapegoated?**

1. **Hilary Moss - *Schooling Citizens: The Struggle for African American Education in Antebellum America* (The Antebellum Period)**

A series of comments made by historians and scholars in reviews of this 2009 book by Moss, a Professor of Black Studies and History at Amherst College, sheds light on what education was like in the 19th century for black Americans.

Historian Peter Hinks:

“the emerging public school system of the antebellum North worked hand-in-hand with an increasingly pervasive culture of white domination to deny African Americans equal access to schools and education—key vehicles for creating citizens—and thereby reinforced the popular understanding that they were noncitizens.”

Brett Gadsden, Associate Professor of African American Studies and History at Emory University:

“when and where African Americans have attempted to improve their lot and claim their rights as citizens, their efforts have often been met with more anxiety and opposition than sympathy and support from their white contemporaries…citizenship has often been narrowly tailored and public resources purposely distributed to privilege whites and disadvantage blacks.”

Sandra Slater, Associate Professor of History the College of Charleston:

“The rise of the common school and its program of creating responsible and intelligent citizens naturally precluded African Americans who lacked access to citizenship and its benefits. As African Americans began to demand education, often creating separate institutions of learning, resistance from whites escalated. It was only in cases where white citizens felt that the racial hierarchy could remain unchallenged were African Americans allowed education, albeit without the accompanying expectations of citizenship.

Excluding African Americans from public schools allowed whites to define who were American citizens, and more importantly, who were not. The politics of exclusion allowed white Americans to implement and defend a racial hierarchy that relied heavily upon assumptions of African American ignorance and illiteracy.”

Beth Barton Schweiger, Professor of History at the University of Arkansas, Fayetteville:

“Public schools were controversial precisely because they were about more than teaching basic literacy and practical knowledge; they were one of the most important socializing institutions in the new republic.”

Rebecca Montgomery, Professor of History at Texas State University, San Marcos:

“White support [for equal education] declined, however, as momentum shifted from colonization to the more radical abolition movement and it appeared that blacks were to be educated for American citizenship. In addition, gradual manumission laws [which ordered the freeing of slaves] provoked white fears of growing African American independence and increased economic competition, both of which could be curtailed by denying blacks educational opportunity.

The common school movement was predicated on the dual beliefs that literacy was central to citizenship and that universal education was necessary to maintain a common national identity, and in antebellum America both whites and blacks realized the profound implications of equal access for the racial order. As the free black population grew, so did white efforts to ensure that ‘American’ and ‘citizen’ were synonymous with ‘white.’ Educational discrimination played an essential role in those efforts, laying the groundwork for the triumph of segregation and a racialized national identity later in the century.”

This effort was not confined to the Antebellum era. In her book *Caste: The Origins of Our Discontent*, Isabel Wilkerson writes that “From Reconstruction to the civil rights era, southern school boards spent as little as one-tenth the money on black schools as for white schools” (233).

**Personal Response Prompt: Do you find links between education and citizenship in American society? What are they? Are there certain “cultural norms” perpetuated by education in America? What are they, and why do you think they exist?**

**Research Prompt: Look into the history of education in Antebellum America. How were the realities described above reflective of a larger program of discrimination? What more can you find out about segregation in education, or the denial of educations to black Americans?**

1. **David Ortiz – *An African-American and Latinx History of the United States*, Ta-Nehisi Coates – *We Were Eight Years in Power: An American Tragedy*, Howard Zinn – *A People’s History of the United States*, Isabel Wilkerson – *Caste: The Origins of Our Discontent* (The New Deal)**

Ortiz argues in the post-WWII era the government was complicit in systemic discrimination against

nonwhites, writing that in the mid-20th century “Congress ensured that millions of Black and Latinx

workers were excluded from New Deal social legislation in order to placate business interests

from South Carolina to California who fought to maintain white business supremacy” (141). This

was accomplished in part because “Agricultural workers and domestic workers – two of the largest

categories of Black and Brown workers – were barred from the core New Deal protections such as

Social Security, the Fair Labor Standards Act, and the National Labor Relations Act, which gave

workers the right to organize” (141-142).

According to Coates, when FDR signed Social Security into law, “65 percent of African Americans nationally and between 70 and 80 percent in the South were ineligible” (186). This was because, as Ortiz states, farmworkers and domestic laborers were excluded – professions largely occupied by black Americans. In fact, according to Coates, “the New Deal’s exclusion of blacks was the price FDR paid to the southern senators for its passage” and systematically locked black Americans out of “the greatest government-backed wealth-building opportunity in the twentieth century” (157). Then there was Title III of the GI Bill, which sought to give WWII veterans low-interest home loans. It was so exclusionary one historian said “it is more accurate simply to say that blacks could not use this particular title” (187).

Zinn, weighing in, says, “most blacks were ignored by the New Deal programs. As tenant farmers, as farm laborers, as migrants, as domestic workers, they didn’t qualify for unemployment insurance, minimum wages, social security, or farm subsidies. Roosevelt, careful not to offend southern white politicians whose political support he needed, did not push a bill against lynching. Blacks and whites were segregated in the armed forces. And black workers were discriminated against in getting jobs. They were the last hired, the first fired” (204).

Quoting sociologist George Lipsitz, Wilkerson in her book writes nonwhites were denied “trillions of dollars of wealth accumulated through the appreciation of housing assets secured by federally-insured loans between 1932 and 1962” (186).

**Personal response prompt: Do you feel like certain people in America are given less favorable treatment by the government? Why is this?**

**Research prompt: Research the history of New Deal discrimination. You might look at things**

**like Title III of the G.I. Bill, or Social Security’s deliberate exclusion of Black Americans.**

**Consider the last quote – can you find support for or against this idea of how capital is passed**

**down from one generation to another in America?**

1. **Howard Zinn – *A People’s History of the United States* (Civil Rights Protests)**

According to Zinn, in 1963, “a northern-based group dedicated to racial equality—CORE (Congress of Racial Equality)—organized ‘Freedom Rides’ in which blacks and whites traveled together on buses going through the South, to try to break the segregation pattern in interstate travel [discouragement of black and white Americans traveling together across state lines]. Such segregation had long been illegal, but the federal government never enforced the law in the South; the President now was John F. Kennedy, but he too seemed cautious about the race question, concerned about the support of southern white leaders of the Democratic party.

The two buses that left Washington, D.C., on May 4, 1963, headed for New Orleans, never got there. In South Carolina, riders were beaten. In Alabama, a bus was set afire. Freedom Riders were attacked with fists and iron bars. The southern police did not interfere with any of this violence, nor did the federal government. FBI agents watched, took notes, did nothing” (453).

“In Jackson, Mississippi, in the spring of 1970, on the campus of Jackson State College, a Negro

college, police laid down a 28-second barrage of gunfire, using shotguns, rifles, and a submachine

gun. Four hundred bullets or pieces of buckshot struck the girls’ dormitory and two black students

were killed. A local grand jury found the attack ‘justified’ and U.S. District Court Judge Harold Cox

(a Kennedy appointee) declared that students who engage in civil disorders ‘must expect to be

injured or killed’” (462).

More on this incident: according to a 2021 article by the Associated Press, “Officers marched onto Jackson State the night of May 14, 1970, to quell protests against racial injustice. According to a report by President Richard Nixon’s Commission on Campus Unrest, Jackson State students had been throwing rocks at white motorists. James ‘Lap’ Baker, a member of the Class of 1970, told The Associated Press…that students were fed up with white people driving through campus shouting racial slurs, throwing bottles and endangering Black pedestrians. Students had gathered outside the Alexander Hall women’s dormitory and B.F. Roberts dining hall across the street – some protesting, others simply enjoying each other’s company as women returned to the dorm before curfew. After midnight that May 15, a Highway Patrol officer used a bullhorn to address students, Baker said. Someone in the crowd threw a bottle, and officers started shooting indiscriminately, later falsely claiming they had seen a sniper in a dorm window. A Jackson TV reporter recorded 28 seconds of gunfire. When it had ended, Gibbs and Green were dead and 12 other people were bleeding. Windows of Alexander Hall shattered and its walls were left with pockmarks still visible today.”

**Personal Response Prompt: Have you experienced or witnessed violence in response to**

**protests? At protests?**

**Research Prompt: Research the Freedom Riders, or violence in the South during the Civil**

**Rights era. What was the role of the federal government? How was the unrest handled by**

**authorities?**

1. **Latin America**

Consider the following information about America’s activities in Latin America:

**Argentina**

1976 – America supports a coup against president Isabel Perón, despite the coup’s numerous human rights violations, which include extrajudicial arrest, mass executions, torture, rape, disappearances of political prisoners and dissenters, and illegal relocations of children born from imprisoned pregnant women [women who became pregnant before their imprisonment, or who were made pregnant by rape while in prison].

According to the website trtworld.com, “In March 1976, Jorge Rafael Videla, the commander in chief of the Argentine Army, led a military coup. He deposed President Isabel Peron and proclaimed himself to be president of Argentina two days later. From 1976 to 1981, Videla’s regime was characterised by the torture, murder and disappearance of socialist political opponents. Some 30,000 Argentinians are estimated to have disappeared during Videla’s rule. The period is known as Argentina's ‘Dirty War.’ It was part of a regionwide state terror and extermination programme known as Operation Condor.” In 1978, America, aiding Videla, “opted to provide further support to Argentina by promising helicopters, along with other types of military aid.”

It’s also important to note the corruption of Perón, who had used her power to unseat leftist governors, and whose Minister of Social Welfare, José López Rega, formed the Argentine Anticommunist Alliance, a paramilitary force which carried out hundreds of murders, including that of a professor, activist, police officer, Vice President, Congressman, and Army Official. Operation Independence would be another organization formed under Perón’s leadership that carried out political violence, and nationwide censorship.

**Chile**

1973-1990 – America supports the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet, despite forced disappearances, murder, and torture of political opponents, and the internment and torture of tens of thousands of citizens. At the time of his death around 300 criminal charges were pending against him, including human rights violations, tax fraud, and embezzlement. In 1973, the CIA helped him overthrow a socialist regime.

According to Wikipedia, “After his rise to power, Pinochet persecuted leftists, socialists, and political critics, resulting in the executions of…1,200 to 3,200 people, the internment of as many as 80,000 people, and the torture of tens of thousands. According to the Chilean government, the number of executions and forced disappearances was 3,095. In 1975 Pinochet founded Operation Condor, an American-backed campaign of political repression, state terror and assassination that was adopted by several South American countries [Argentina – as mentioned above, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Paraguay, and Uruguay] and responsible for 60,000 deaths, 30,000 disappearances, and 400,000 cases of imprisonment.

According to the National Security Archive, then-U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger claimed “The example of a successful elected Marxist government in Chile would surely have an impact on – and even precedent value for – other parts of the world, especially in Italy; the imitative spread of similar phenomena elsewhere would in turn significantly affect the world balance and our own position in it.”

**Nicaragua**

1981-1987 – President Ronald Reagan admits the U.S. was secretly selling weapons to Iran to fund the Contras, a coalition of rebel forces hostile to Nicaragua’s Sandinista Junta, a socialist government. America at this point had a longstanding policy of helping Central and South American countries to defeat socialist governments, with a rationale of “stopping the spread” of their influence. Human rights advocacy group Americas Watch has claimed the Contras were guilty of numerous human rights violations, including targeting health care clinics and health care workers for assassination, kidnapping civilians, torturing civilians, executing civilians – including children, who were captured in combat – raping women, seizing civilian property, and burning civilian houses in captured towns.

During a special investigation, administration officials destroyed or withheld large volumes of documents; Reagan’s direct knowledge of the secret, unauthorized funding was never proven, but the investigation resulted in fourteen indicted U.S. officials, with eleven convictions.

**Panama**

1967-2009 – The U.S. maintained several military bases around the Panama Canal, and enlisted Manuel Noriega as a paid informant of the CIA, starting in 1971; at the time he was Panama’s head of intelligence. Noriega at first provided the CIA with information on Cuba’s government and Nicaragua’s Sandinista Junta. By 1971, he was receiving regular payments. The CIA knew at this time that Noriega was also selling information on the U.S. to Cuba.

In the mid-1980s, the U.S. was concerned about Nicaragua’s socialist government, and wanted to aid the Contras. Noriega proved to be a valuable link, providing a conduit for money and weapons to them [he also helped the U.S. back opposition to a socialist government in El Salvador].

By 1983, Noriega was the head of Panama’s government, and the support of the U.S. helped him to amass a fortune, accumulate near total control over Panama, and become a key player in Central America’s drug trade. Panama became a haven of drug trafficking, and corruption ran rampant under his de facto dictatorship. Noriega oversaw control of the press, and the expulsion and murder of political rivals; he also passed a law that tripled the size of the military, and gave the National Guard control over immigration, customs, commercial transportation, railroads, and airports.

Soon, American media would publish story after story of Noriega’s activities and the U.S. government’s involvement with him. The U.S. in 1989 invaded Panama, and captured Noriega. Their official reasons were to combat drug trafficking, protect the 35,000 U.S. citizens in Panama, to defend democracy, and to protect the neutrality of the canal. He was put on trial in Miami, convicted on eight of ten charges of drug trafficking, racketeering, and money laundering, and sentenced to forty years in prison. In 2010, after serving seventeen years, he was extradited to France, where he was convicted of money laundering and sentenced to seven years in jail. At this time, Panama also wanted to extradite him on charges of murder. After about a year in France he was sent to Panama, and incarcerated there for five years until his death in 2017.

Source: Wikipedia, except where otherwise noted.

**Personal Response Prompt: Have you heard or learned about these things in your education? Somewhere else? How do you feel about this information? Are the actions of the U.S. justified on any level?**

**Research Prompt: Find people who support or defend this activity, and people who oppose it. What are some of the things they say?**

1. **Jonathan Haidt – *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People Are Divided by Politics and Religion* (Cultural Norms / Morality)**

In his book, Haidt provides a chart which compares what Americans and Indians find acceptable and unacceptable morally, with points of agreement and contrast:

* Both Indians and Americans agreed it was wrong to kick a sleeping dog, and to promise a son a pen for doing well on an exam but then not give him one.
* As for what Americans were more likely to say was wrong: a son was legally allowed to claim more of a deceased father’s estate than a daughter was.
* As for what Indians were more likely to say was wrong: a 25-year old called their father by a first name; after defecating, a woman didn’t change her clothes before cooking (19).

**Personal Response Prompt: Do you feel that there are certain “mainstream values” in the society you live in? What are they? Do you agree or disagree with them? Do you feel you’re part of “mainstream culture”?**

**Research Prompt: Pick a country and research their cultural norms. Show how they compare to those of America, or the culture you were brought up in.**

Haidt and several colleagues surveyed thousands of people about morality and values on the website yourmorals.org. They claim to have established, through these surveys, what they call “The Five Pillars of Morality.”

These five pillars are:

1. Caring for the vulnerable [born of a need to protect a group’s weakest members];

2. Ensuring fairness [born of a need for cooperation between different groups];

3. Loyalty [born of a need to evaluate members of a group individually];

4. Authority [born of a need for group organization];

5. Holding certain things sacred [born of a need to promote good behavior and fortify group identities] (178-179)

Researchers found that #1 and #2 were most reflective of liberal values, with #1 being by far the most important value to liberals; meanwhile, conservatives valued all five more or less equally, with a slight uptick as you go from #1-5. In another survey, a sixth category called “Freedom from oppression” was added, and those who identified as libertarian held this as their most important value [by a very large margin].

**Personal Response Prompt: Which of the values do you think are most important to you? Do**

**you feel this is reflective of your political identity?**

**Research Prompt: Find out more about the links between political positions and morality.**

**What do people of different political persuasions generally have to say about what their moral**

**codes are? Do they seem similar to what Haidt provides? Different? Why is this?**

1. **Arlie Hochschild – *Strangers in Their Own Land: Anger and Mourning on the American Right* (Community / Government)**

In her sociological study of Southwestern Louisianans, Hochschild notes how the left and right in America see “community” differently. The right, she argues, tends to value community as a place where established values are sustained, and where people in need go for support. One man tells her, “when I was struggling and we needed help, I never went straight to the government. You know where I went? I went into my church. I went into my community” (1033). Hochschild writes that, concurrently, “The liberal upper-middle class saw community as insularity and closed-mindedness rather than as a source of belonging and honor” (3581). Liberals, she thinks, are “cosmopolitan selves…directed to the task of cracking into the global elite” (3581). This perhaps leads them to see community as quaint, backwards, lacking in the ability to transform, adapt, accommodate new perspectives. So they opt for the global, the cosmopolitan, the new, the innovative, the diverse. [big numbers = citations from a Kindle reader]

**Personal Response Prompt: What is your sense of “community”? Does it align more with what Hochschild describes as a conservative orientation, or a liberal one? Do you feel your political orientation is linked to your feelings on community?**

**Research Prompt: Find out more about how different cultures define community. Do these definitions have political leanings?**

Hochschild claims conservatives see government as an apparatus of liberal control, an alien entity that invades their communities, gives them new rules, disrespects their values, identities, and ways of life, takes their money, and uses it to empower people they see as outsiders. When the federal government is run by Democrats, it is very easy to villainize government as an intrusive, encroaching entity empowering these outsiders. Hochschild tells us this is something that goes way back. She mentions the Civil War, and the legacy of how “the North had to come to the South, as it had with soldiers in the 1860s and during Reconstruction in the 1870s, to tell Southern whites to change their way of life” (3506). She also discusses the Civil Rights era, telling us that “When the 1960s began sending freedom riders and civil rights activists, pressing for new federal laws to dismantle Jim Crow, there they came again, it seemed, the moralizing North.” To this day, people associate progressives with “the North.” One Louisianan tells her “Hillary Clinton, Bernie Sanders – they’re from the North” (3442).

**Personal Response Prompt: What are your personal feelings on the role government plays in your life? What about the role it *should* play? Do you see differences in how local, state, and federal government impacts your life?**

**Research Prompt: Find different opinions on what people say is the appropriate role government should play in American life. Why do they feel this way? Is it connected to a political identity?**

1. **Alethia Jones, Virginia Eubanks, and Barbara Smith *– Ain’t Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me Around: Forty Years of Movement Building With Barbara Smith* (Education / Childhood Exclusion / Capitalism / Representation / Coalition-Building / The Status Quo)**

Smith was born in 1946 and grew up in Cleveland, Ohio. Education was important in Smith’s family – her grandmother worked as a schoolteacher, and her mother was considered “highly educated for a Black woman of her time” (16). She describes how her mother’s education didn’t seem to create opportunity, saying in one interview, “our mother, with her college degree, a Bachelor’s of Science in Education, the two jobs that she had during my young life were as a nurse’s aide and as a supermarket clerk” (15). This was common, Smith says: “there were Black folks with PhDs working in the U.S. postal service because they couldn’t get jobs elsewhere. That’s just the way it was” (16).

**Personal Response Prompt: Do you feel you come from an “educated” family? Does this influence the expectations they have of you? That you have of yourself? Do you find yourself perhaps in the opposite situation, with few members in your family who have gone to college? Are they supportive of your efforts?**

**Research Prompt: Find information on employment discrimination in the 1950s. Do you find differences when you go from region to region?**

Smith gives descriptions of what it was like to grow up in 1950s Ohio as a young woman of color. In one passage, she recounts a time when children at her elementary school, most of whom were white, were required to bring in food for a class event. Smith says that “out of her full-time work schedule, [her mother] of course complied and made chocolate chip cookies, and we took them to class. And do you think any of those white children would touch them? I will never forget it as long as I live” (19). Smith and her twin sister were eight years old at the time.

**Personal Response Prompt: Do you feel you were treated unfairly or differently in your childhood? Did it have to do with race?**

**Research Prompt: Find information on racism in the 1950s, and how the trauma of exclusion affects children.**

A significant theme in this text is the power structure in America. This power structure, to Smith, is rooted in what you might call racialized economics – or white patriarchal capitalism, a system that privileges an entrenched few, lets a few others in, and seduces many of us into wanting in vain what it has to offer. Hallmarks of this system, to Smith, are what white people define as success, and the devastating effect of turning Americans against one another as we pursue the rewards life has to offer. We learn in the book’s foreword that in a document titled the Combahee River Collective Statement, “Smith and her two coauthors [her sister and a woman named Demita Frazier] argued that a nonracist, nonsexist society could not be created under capitalism” (xix).

In order to combat this system, Smith believes, we need “a most thorough revolution of the institutions and cultural practices that assign worth and privilege” (5). A capitalist culture, and this is a critique of feminism offered by Jessa Crispin in *Why I Am Not A Feminist: A Feminist Manifesto*, makes people want to ascend to the top of it, and we equate power and success with acquiring currency within it – which, again, only reinforces the status quo. We equate empowerment with imitating those who are powerful, living like them. *Being* them. This is dictated, and dominated, by patriarchal white males. In an essay titled “Soul on Hold,” Smith writes, “coalitions fail when individuals must meet a white, male, heterosexual standard” (178).

**Personal Response Prompt: What do you define as success? Power? What do you think influences these definitions?**

**Research Prompt: Find other critiques of capitalism. Are they pro or con? Do they equate it with male standards of success? Do they connect it to race?**

One way Smith calls attention to racism is by referencing her own experience. For instance, growing up in Cleveland, her immersion in black culture gave her a limited view of society. As a child, she writes, “It didn’t occur to me that not every little girl was seeing a Black cast perform Little Red Riding Hood” (18). As she grew up though, and became immersed in American culture beyond her community in Cleveland, Smith began to see that American society was, in fact, largely white society. When Smith saw black feminist Fannie Lou Hamer on television speaking at the 1964 Democratic Convention, she was transfixed, because, in her words, “it was like, ‘Black people never get to talk on TV about anything. Particularly Black women’” (25).

According to current figures, right now black Americans make up 12.3 % of the U.S. population, and 3% of the Senate. Also, Hispanic Americans are about 12.5% of the population, and 2% of the Senate. Asian Americans are 5.4% of the population, and 2% of the Senate. And white Americans, who are about 69% of the population, are 93% of the Senate.

**Personal Response Prompt: Do you feel your race is over or underrepresented in American life? Why is this?**

**Research Prompt: Find information on how different groups are portrayed in media and entertainment. Does evidence show certain races or groups or more prominently featured? Has this changed over time?**

Much of Smith’s activism has to do with coalition building, which she defines as “the genuine pursuit of something other than self-interest and personal advantage, and acting in ways that are consistent with your internal values” (5). Smith places importance on personal transformation, and selflessness, saying when someone is taking a position of advocacy they should ask, “Are you doing this to serve yourself, to line your pockets, or do you have a commitment to the greater good of your community?” (31). Another element of activism is consciousness raising, or CR, defined by her as “personal sharing, risk-taking and involvement, which are essential for getting at how each of us is racist in a daily way; and it encourages ‘personal’ change that makes political transformation and action possible” (75).

Smith talks about the importance of changing the system, and not merely alleviating the burdens of those who are victimized by it. “*If you’re not dealing with root causes and material conditions*” she says, “*then you’re not really making change*. You’ve got to deal with what most affects people on a daily basis where they live” (283). You must fight injustice structurally, or you’re not making much of a difference. It’s one thing to spoon out some food at a homeless shelter, to volunteer at a day care center, to donate to a worthy cause, but essentially, Smith argues, all you’re doing is easing the burdens for those who are victimized by injustice – you’re not tackling injustice itself.

**Personal Response Prompt: Do you play an active role in the well-being of others? What about changing systems for the better?**

**Research Prompt: Find information on what other people consider the core of their activism. What types of “injustice” are people saying needs to change?**

“Educational institutions,” she says, “socialize us into the dominant individualistic career achievement model that renders the study of everything, even freedom movements, as individual intellectual pursuits” (8). In this same passage she also writes that “education becomes a means to fit in and get ahead rather than a tool of broader social change that helps to unravel the biases and assumptions that justify an oppressive status quo” (8).

**Personal Response Prompt: Do you agree with what Smith has to say about education? What do you think is the primary benefit of education? What should it be? Can it be multiple things? Different things to different people?**

**Research Prompt: Find information on what people think is wrong with education in America today – what it should be about, and what needs to change.**

1. **Textbooks**

In a 2015 article titled “Black History Whitewashed in Textbooks” that appeared in the *Miami Herald*, columnist Leonard Pitts, Jr. wrote the following: “In recent years, we’ve seen Arizona outlaw ethnic studies, Texas teach that slavery was a ‘side issue’ to the Civil War, a Colorado school board require a ‘positive’ spin on American history.”

In a 2018 article titled ‘Textbook Racism,” which appeared in *The* *Chronicle of Higher Education*, Harvard scholar Donald Yacovone wrote the following:

“The assumptions of white priority, white domination, and white importance underlie every chapter and every theme of the thousands of textbooks that blanketed the country [in the 19th and 20th centuries]. This is the vast tectonic plate that underlies American culture. And while the worst features of our textbook legacy may have ended, the themes, facts, and attitudes of supremacist ideologies are deeply embedded in what we teach and how we teach it.

Scholars often bemoan their lack of influence: embarrassing book sales figures and the like. Yet my review of American textbooks revealed that historians of the 20th century exerted an enormous impact on the way Americans have come to understand their history. The results are painfully evident. Their work either filtered down into schools, as interpreted by educators, administrators, and popular authors, or appeared directly: Ph.D.-trained scholars wrote many of the textbooks I read. To appreciate why white supremacy remains such an integral part of American society, we need to appreciate how much it suffused our teaching from the outset.”

**Personal Response Prompt: Do you feel textbooks you have been given to read accurately reflect American history? Do you feel they privilege certain perspectives over others? Marginalize or ignore certain perspectives? Why do you think this is?**

**Research Prompt: Find examples of controversy behind textbooks. What information is argued over?**

1. **Howard Zinn – *A People’s History of the United States***, **George Packer –** ***The Unwinding: An Inner History of the New America*****(Wealth Allocation)**

Consider the following quotes about wealth in America provided by these two authors:

“The Federal Census of 1850 showed that a thousand southern families at the top of the economy received about $50 million a year income, while all the other families, about 660,000, received about $60 million a year” (Zinn, 236).

\* Adjusted for inflation, that averages out to about $15 million per family for .0015% of southern families, and about $3,000 per family for the remaining 99.985%.

“In 1887, with a huge surplus in the treasury, [President Grover] Cleveland vetoed a bill appropriating $100,000 to give relief to Texas farmers to help them buy seed grain during a drought. He said: ‘Federal aid in such cases…encourages the expectation of paternal care on the part of the government and weakens the sturdiness of our national character.’ But that same year, Cleveland used his gold surplus to pay off wealthy bondholders at $28 above the $100 value of each bond – a gift of $45 million” (Zinn, 259).

\* Adjusted for inflation, that’d be like telling Texas farmers in 2020 asking for $3 million in aid you couldn’t help him, and then turning around and giving your rich friends $1.3 billion in free money.

“It was not the Republicans but the Democrats – the Kennedy-Johnson administrations – who, under the guise of ‘tax reform,’ first lowered the World War II-era rate of 91 percent on incomes over $400,000 a year to 70 percent. During the Carter Administration (though over his objections) Democrats and Republicans in Congress joined to give even more tax breaks to the rich” (Zinn, 580).

“The Reagan administration, with the help of Democrats in Congress, lowered the tax rate on the very rich to 50 percent and in 1986 a coalition of Republicans and Democrats sponsored another ‘tax reform’ bill that lowered the top rate to 28 percent” (Zinn, 580).

“As a result of all the tax bills from 1978 to 1990, the net worth of the ‘Forbes 400,’ chosen as the richest in the country by *Forbes Magazine* (advertising itself as a ‘capitalist tool’), was tripled. About $70 billion a year was lost in government revenue, so that in those thirteen years the wealthiest 1 percent of the country gained a trillion dollars” (Zinn…580’s quite a page).

“According to the business magazine *Forbes*, the 400 richest families owned $92 billion in 1982, but thirteen years later this had jumped to $480 billion. In the nineties, the wealth of the 500 corporations of the Standard and Poor’s Index had increased by 335 percent” (Zinn, 662).

Packer writes that between 1970 and 2007, “The top 1 percent more than tripled its share of national income, while the income of those in the middle rose by only 20 percent, and the income of those at the bottom stayed flat” (224).

The Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy reported that from 2001-2018, around $1 trillion in tax cuts went to the richest 1% of Americans, and that from 2018-2025, close to an additional $2 trillion in tax cuts will go to the richest 1% of Americans.

These are tax *cuts*. As in – *in addition to* the money they already take out of the system annually. And already have historically. It’s hard to pin down how much the richest 1% take out of the system every year, but consider this: in 2019, the *Washington Post* reported that the 400 richest families paid a lower tax rate than the poorest 50% of Americans in 2018.

**Personal Response Prompt: What do you think fair taxation is? Do you favor a “flat tax,” where everyone pays an equal amount, or “progressive taxation,” where the more you make, the more you pay?**

**Research Prompt: What are the taxation policies today? What do different people say is fair?**

1. **Modern Racism and Political Support**

Consider the following statements made in recent years:

*“White nationalist, white supremacist, Western civilization — how did that language become offensive? Why did I sit in classes teaching me about the merits of our history and our civilization?”* [2018].

*“This whole business does get a little tired. I would ask you to go back through history and figure out where are these contributions that have been made by these other categories of people you are talking about. Where did any other subgroup of people contribute more to civilization?”* [2016].

That’s Representative Steve King, from Iowa, talking. He was reelected in 2018, after both of these statements were made, as the U.S. House Representative for Iowa, a position he held from 2003 to 2021.

*“Republicans are struggling to find the great white hope.”*

Lynn Jenkins speaking, who said this in 2009 about the right’s response to Barack Obama’s presidency. That same year, she began serving as a house rep for Kansas, a position which she still holds today.

*“Far more of the African American community is being devastated by the policies of today than were being devastated by the policies of slavery.”*

This comes from Trent Franks, a house rep for Arizona from 2003-2017. He made that statement in 2010, the halfway point of his tenure.

**Personal Response Prompt: Why do you think these people continued to get reelected after making these statements?**

**Research Prompt: Find examples of public figures saying derogatory things about groups of people. What were the consequences?**

1. **Voter Suppression**

According to the article “New Voting Restrictions in America” published in 2019 by the Brennan Center for Justice, “In 2016, 14 states had new voting restrictions in place for the first time in a presidential election.”

Which fourteen states?

Let’s sort them by how they voted in the 2016 election.

Republican: Alabama, Arizona, Indiana, Kansas, Mississippi, Nebraska, Ohio, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, Wisconsin.

Democrat: New Hampshire, Rhode Island.

In 2018, Arkansas [R], Indiana [R], Montana [R], New Hampshire [D], North Carolina [R], and Wisconsin [R] enacted new restrictions.

In 2019, Arizona [R], Florida [R], Indiana [R], Tennessee [R], and Texas [R] enacted new restrictions.

According to the Brennan Center for Justice in May, 2021, “Across the country, the effort to restrict the vote continues, with a wave of bills moving through state legislatures and becoming law. Between January 1 and May 14, 2021, at least 14 states enacted 22 new laws that restrict access to the vote. The United States is on track to far exceed its most recent period of significant voter suppression – 2011. By October of that year, 19 restrictive laws were enacted in 14 states. This year, the country has already reached that level, and it’s only May.

Same question: which fourteen states?

Let’s sort them by how they voted in the 2020 election.

Alabama [R], Arizona [D], Florida [R], Georgia [D], Idaho [R], Indiana [R], Iowa [R], Kansas [R], Kentucky [R], Missouri [R], Montana [R], Oklahoma [R], Utah [R], Wyoming [R].

A 2018 article that appeared in the *New Yorker* titled “Voter-Suppression Tactics in the Age of Trump” shows that in the 2018 race for the governorship of Georgia, Republican candidate and Georgia Secretary of State Brian Kemp “invoked the so-called exact-match law to suspend fifty-three thousand voter-registration applications, for infractions as minor as a hyphen missing from a surname. African-Americans make up thirty-two per cent of the state’s population, but they represent nearly seventy per cent of the suspended applications.” The author of the article, historian Jelani Cobb, writes that in Georgia, “In 2012, after the Asian American Legal Advocacy Center, in Atlanta, discovered that many of its clients who were naturalized citizens were not on the voter rolls, despite having registered, the group raised the issue with Kemp’s office.” According to historian Carol Anderson, “In a show of raw intimidation, Kemp ordered an investigation questioning the methods that the organization had used to register new voters.” When the election took place, “officials in Jefferson County…ordered a group of African-American senior citizens off a bus taking them to an early-voting site, on the ground that the transportation, which had been organized by the nonpartisan group Black Voters Matter, was a ‘political activity.’”

In 2018, “ninety-nine bills designed to diminish voter access were introduced…in thirty-one state legislatures.” Cobb tells us that “North Carolina enacted restrictions on early voting, a policy that particularly affects African-Americans, who are likely to be hourly-wage workers and cannot always get to the polls on Election Day. Last year [2017], the Supreme Court declined to hear an appeal to reinstate a voter-I.D. law in North Carolina that a federal court had found targeted black voters ‘with almost surgical precision.’” According to Charlotte news organization WFAE, “in 2013…the state made cuts to early voting, created a photo ID requirement and eliminated same-day registration, out-of-precinct voting and preregistration of high school students. More than half of all voters there use early voting, and African-Americans do so at higher rates than whites. ”

According to an NBC article titled “‘Tidal Wave of Voter Suppression’ Washes Over States, Lawyer Says,” published in early 2020, “In Texas, officials in mostly white Waller County, citing cost concerns, announced that they would not make an early voting site available on the campus of a historically black university.” That article goes on to say “States are engaging in aggressive voter roll purges, polling site closures and uneven voting resource allocations that, in some cases, violate the law…However, the Justice Department under President Donald Trump has not filed a single voting rights case on behalf of voters of color.”

**Personal Response Prompt: Do you feel there is an epidemic of voter suppression in America? Why do you think this is occurring?**

**Research Prompt: Find new examples (not historical) of voter suppression in America. Try for anything after 2018 not mentioned above. Do you find these persuasive? Why or why not?**

1. **Nicole Chung – *All You Can Ever Know: A Memoir* (Transracial Adoption)**

Chung was raised by white adoptive parents in an unnamed Oregon town; she tells us it was a small place about five hours from Portland [likely to the south]. As a child she stood out in an overwhelmingly white society and experienced racist bullying. She writes, “I tried not to react to the pulled-back eyes, the stinging chants” (16) and talks about how as a kid, this society made her wish she were white. “If I were a heroine in a fairy tale,” she says, “and a fairy godmother offered to grant me wishes, I would ask for peaches-and-cream skin, eyes like deep blue pools, hair spun like gold instead of blackest ink” (17). When she read books with female characters growing up, her reaction was, “as much as I loved these spunky literary heroines, they too were all white, and I couldn’t see how I would ever find my way into lives like theirs” (36). She grew up believing “To be beautiful and adored, you had to be white” (36).

Chung talks in detail about a childhood rife with confusion and alienation. She writes, “For me, it had always been this way: a wide sea seemed to separate the lone island of my experience from the well-mapped continents on which other people, other families, resided” (63). Later, when she went to college [Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore], she “loved being just one Asian girl among thousands…I felt relieved to have found a life where I was no longer surrounded by white people who had no idea what to make of me” (8).

She also talks about how growing up in a white society made her reluctant to engage with her Asian background. “If asked, I would almost certainly have refused to take Korean lessons or go away to adoption ‘culture camp,’ as some adoptees do now,” she writes, adding that even as she got older, “I still did not want to be Asian if it meant being alone” (42). Chung however grew to have certain feelings of inadequacy for not being more connected to that heritage. Later in the book she claims to have “always envied other Koreans I knew who spoke the language so effortlessly, including my birth father and my sister [this book is largely about seeking out and meeting the family she was born into]; their cultural identities had seemed infinitely more natural, less ambiguous than my own” (216). She began to worry that her daughter “will know less about Korean culture than many other Korean kids whose parents were not adopted” (202-203) and decided her daughter should learn about what it means to be Korean. “I hadn’t been able to bear the thought of her growing up without her history” (216), she writes.

**Personal Response Prompt: Chung’s book is about a growing trend in America: transracial adoption. Do you know anything about this? If so, can you spot hardships like what Chung describes?**

**Research Prompt: Find other examples of adopted children in America. They need not be transracial adoptions, but it is an option. What do they have to say about what it’s like to grow up adopted? About seeking out their birth family? About racial differences in their families and communities?**

1. **Garrard Conley – *Boy Erased: A Memoir of Identity, Faith, and Family* (Homophobia)**

Conley’s book is about growing up as the gay son of a preacher in rural Arkansas. As a young man, he writes, “Though over the years I’d done my best to pretend otherwise, I’d had a string of male crushes that wouldn’t go away, a constant guilty ache that ran through my body for so long that I came to believe that feeling was just a part of what it meant to be alive” (148). He talks about doing “anything to stop my mind from its infinite blame loop” (83) and how “I felt I was evil somewhere deep inside, in the same place I had stored my fantasies of older men – some of them men from [his father’s car dealership], some from the church” (249). He says that his father, after learning he was gay, told him “You’ll never step foot in this house again if you act on your feelings. You’ll never finish your education” (135) and threatened to stop paying for college.

Conley talks about the huge stigma of being gay in his community. “It was possible I wouldn’t even have a career if I couldn’t change who I was,” he writes. “My parents certainly wouldn’t pay for my education and, for all I knew, employers didn’t hire gay people” (298). He brings up Dr. Julie, a therapist who spoke to his mother in a sympathetic tone in front of him, that would “protect my mother from the stark reality of having a gay son in the South in a strictly religious community” (266). Conley writes extensively on what it feels like to come to terms with being gay in a small, religious town, with his father as a key member of the community no less. When considering the idea of conversion therapy, he writes that his thoughts were “*Anything. I’ll do anything to erase this part of me*” (135). A few pages later he writes that “it seemed like God had abandoned me” (140). Being gay in the South, he writes, is to experience “an embarrassment of sins for which you constantly felt the need to apologize, repent, beg forgiveness” (86). He even sympathizes with his parents, writing, “It was hard to imagine how disappointing it must have been for them to figure out I wasn’t quite all that they had hoped for, a stain on their otherwise perfect union” (287).

Here are some citations from the Trevor Project’s, “Facts About LGBTQ Youth Suicide”:

“LGBTQ youth are more than four times as likely to attempt suicide than their peers”

“transgender and nonbinary youth were 2 to 2.5 times as likely to experience depressive symptoms, seriously consider suicide, and attempt suicide compared to their cisgender LGBQ peers”

“LGB youth who come from highly rejecting families are 8.4 times as likely to have attempted suicide as LGB peers who reported no or low levels of family rejection”

**Personal Response Prompt: Do you see connections between the reality Conley describes and members of the LGBTQ community experience? What are they?**

**Research Prompt: Look for stories on other gay, bisexual or transgender Americans, and what they describe as their struggles. Have any of them had different reactions to accepting their identity, or coming out? Integrating into society? Why was this?**

1. **Wesley Yang – *The Souls of Yellow Folk: Essays* (Family / Culture)**

Yang, who was born and raised in New Jersey, describes life as an Asian-American male in modern-day America. A lot of the information we get comes from Asian-Americans he interviews. One is a man named Daniel Chu, who tells us what it was like for him growing up in a Chinese culture: “When you grow up in a Chinese home,” Chu says, “you don’t talk. You shut up and listen to what your parents tell you to do” (38). This at times is a problem, Yang argues, when one must negotiate the “breaking of individual autonomy in favor of the demands of the family” (67).

**Personal Response Prompt: Do you feel like your family experiences are similar to this? Are the values of your family shaped by cultural norms?**

**Research Prompt: Find examples from young people who come from different cultures, talking about their family values. Are they the same as “American” values? Why or why not?**

Yang also discusses the American workforce. In corporate America, he writes, when it comes to Asians there are “virtually none in the higher reaches of leadership” (40). A roadblock seems to exist between academic and professional success. For instance, he writes, “If between 15 and 20 percent of every Ivy League class is Asian, and if the Ivy Leagues are incubators for the country’s leaders, it would stand to reason that Asians would make up some corresponding portion of the leadership class” (40).

**Personal Response Prompt: Why do you feel there is a disconnect between Ivy League graduates and leadership in America, when it comes to race? Is this something that can change? How?**

**Research Prompt: Look into demographics in positions of leadership – in government, corporate America, or local leadership. Is there a disconnect between leadership demographics and demographics of broader society?**

Yang goes into detail about why we often submit to the authority of a “culture,” and blindly follow its norms. “The whole point of living in a culture,” he tells us, “is that much of the labor of perception and judgment is done for you, spread through media, and absorbed through an imperceptible process that has no single author” (193). This leads into a discussion of the culture of white supremacy, which he claims is more ubiquitous, insidious, and subtle than a lot of people realize. Yang writes that “there is no whiteness independent of the domination of nonwhites” and “white” and “masculinity” are “forms of identity rooted in genocide, colonialism, and slavery that reproduce the violent conditions of their emergence everywhere they are treated as neutral descriptors of traits incidental to the person whom they characterize” (202). In other words, to treat whiteness as something benign is to ignore what had to occur for “white man” to be America’s most powerful demographic; also, that whiteness is *predicated* on that power, and on nonwhites occupying a lower station in our society, and white people can’t pretend this is not a historical fact or present-day reality that they benefit from. The white man in a white male society [and this is according to white writer Aaron Bady], is often inclined to “take his own experience as normal and privileged, and to presume all others to be debased copies of his own primary existence” (202).

A few pages later Yang gives us a list that shows “socially acceptable and socially unacceptable forms of white supremacy” (207). Among the “acceptable” is “bootstrap theory” “English-only initiatives,” “denial of racism” “claiming reverse racism” and “not believing experiences of POC [people of color]” (208). It is vital, in assessing this society, to “distinguish between great and petty instances of white supremacy” (215). Yang calls white supremacy “an instrument in pursuit of a substantive political program” (212-213), and “a weapon of opprobrium” (213).

**Personal Response Prompt: Do you agree with what Yang has to say about a legacy and ongoing presence of white supremacy in America? Are there specific examples that have influenced your thinking?**

**Research Prompt: Find people who agree and disagree with Yang. What do they have to say, and what is their motivation for speaking out?**

1. **Arno Michaelis and Pardeep Singh Kaleka – *The Gift of Our Wounds: A Sikh and a Former White Supremacist Find Forgiveness After Hate* (Isolation)**

In one passage of this co-authored book, Kaleka, an Indian-born Sikh who moved as a child to Milwaukee, claims his parents didn’t understand that unlike them, he was under pressure to negotiate American society as much more of an active participant in it. And in large part, the end result was a feeling of rejection, of not fitting in. “As much as they cared about me,” he writes, “they couldn’t know the isolation that someone of color felt when they were alone in an all-white world” (56). Later, he would attend Milwaukee’s second-biggest college, Marquette University, where the campus “was a rainbow of colors and cultures, including students of Indian descent, which made me feel immediately at ease” (57).

**Personal Response Prompt: Have you had the experience of being a cultural outsider? How did it make you feel? Was this something others in your family could or couldn’t relate to?**

**Research Prompt: Look into the struggles first-generation Americans face, or what they call Generation 1.5, which is someone born in another country who moved to America at a young age. Are stories like Kaleka’s common? What are some of the other struggles they describe?**

1. **Jessa Crispin – *Why I Am Not a Feminist; A Feminist Manifesto* (Patriarchal Values / Consumptionism)**

Crispin seems to suggest feminism has been warped by women’s increased participation in public life, which means they are increasingly enjoying high status in the pre-existing structure, and hence are more reluctant to change it. “People don’t like change,” she says, “and so feminism must be close to the status quo – with minor modifications – in order to recruit large numbers” (xi). She also says, “Now that we have access as women, women in positions of power are much less likely to attempt to dismantle this system of inequality” (58). The masculine organization of society runs deep, and those who want power, men or women, find themselves submitting to it. Later in the book Crispin writes “Our society so values masculine modes of life and masculine ways of seeing and judging, rewarding those who fall in line, that we internalize this process” of male judgment (112). She adds, “it is our entire culture, the way it runs on money, rewards inhumanity, encourages disconnection and isolation, causes great inequality and suffering, that’s the enemy” (105).

In another section she writes, “To understand how surface-level contemporary feminism really is, we need only note that the most common markers of feminism’s success are the same markers of success in patriarchal capitalism. Namely, money and power” (20). Also, that “Feminism has been marred by these patriarchal values. It has been warped in the name of greed and power. Feminism was seduced by all the pleasures the patriarchal world has to offer and overwhelmed by the enormous amount of work it would take to break it apart” (33).

**Personal Response Prompt: Do you think common definitions of success in America are money and power? What effect do you feel this has on you? Are there other definitions of “success”?**

**Research Prompt: Find another critique of modern-day feminism in America. Does this person agree with Crispin? Why or why not?**

Crispin also talks about how our life habits contribute to a less equitable world. She argues that no matter who you are, “once you reached a certain level of money or fame, it would be more personally advantageous for you to fight for your own needs rather than contribute to a system that offered fairness for all” (48). This preserves a status quo “by which the powerful maintain their position through the control and the oppression of the many” (56). Everyday existence, she writes, “requires participation in systems of oppression and misery” (42). She states, with cynicism, that part of today’s feminist imperative is “a fight to allow women to participate equally in the oppression of the powerless and the poor” (xiii). She focuses not just on the rewards and comfort of corporate culture, but income inequality, and our consumption habits. She discusses the difficulty of activism and responsible spending when we’re under pressure to work, and stretch our dollars as far as possible.

And there’s *the way* we spend money. Mocking people who justify their spending habits, she says, “We know god, WE KNOW, shut up already – that that cute top was sewn by children, in a factory with such lax safety standards that at almost any moment the whole thing could go, taking hundreds of lives with it. But fuck it, we want that top” (45). Wealthier people, she believes, should feel an obligation to end a corporate culture that degrades women, men, children, and the earth, as opposed to benefiting from that culture, and how we spend our money is a huge part of that.

**Personal Response Prompt: Do you feel your spending habits contribute to environmental destruction? Worker degradation? Corporate greed? What are they?**

**Research Prompt: Find out what people have to say about responsible consumption. Is it possible to live in a way that promotes equality? What sacrifices are required?**

1. **Jessa Crispin – *Why I Am Not a Feminist; A Feminist Manifesto*,Tara Westover – *Educated: A Memoir*, Reyna Grande – *A Dream Called Home* (Wealth, Activism, or Personal Goals?)**

Crispin discusses how feminism has typically been a project for wealthy women, a trend that continues today. She writes that “in this age of precarity, work and money are so elusive that cutting back hours can mean a slide into irrelevance or unemployability for many. This is part of the problem of creating a unified front for feminism: the median feminist is generally going to be a middle-class, educated white woman” (28). Less wealthy people are often too bound up in the problems of life to do anything besides negotiate that. “The actual obstacles and inequalities that women face,” she says, “are mostly obstacles only for the poor – middle class women and above can now buy their access to power and equality” (50). And feminism does not do enough to look out for the poor, in her view. In this same section, she writes that “The issues most pressing for lower income women…have slipped off the feminist radar” (51). Another thing about this is that the workforce is competitive, and this has the unfortunate effect of pitting privileged women against poor ones. In this Darwinian climate, women see “the other marginalized not as our equals, but as competition for power” (65).

Westover in her book writes that in order to succeed academically she needed the time, space, and quiet to do her work, and that economic problems were a distraction. Discussing her early years as a student at Brigham Young University, she says, “Curiosity is a luxury reserved for the financially secure: my mind was absorbed with more immediate concerns, such as the exact balance of my bank account, who I owed how much, and whether there was anything in my room I could sell for ten or twenty dollars” (203).

In her memoir, Grande writes about how after college, her writing career went on the backburner, and really all but disappeared from her life. After she was done with a day of teaching at a middle school in South Central Los Angeles, she writes that “In the evening, I would arrive at [her brother] Carlos’s house feeling emotionally drained and physically exhausted. And I didn’t have a room of my own where I could retreat and recharge…My writing waited for me to return to it, but I could write only a few pages before exhaustion overwhelmed me” (163). She also says “As the weeks stretched into months I wrote less and less, until eventually I stopped completely” (170).

**Personal Response Prompt: Do you feel that there are things in life you have to sacrifice because of the demands of life? What are they?**

**Research Prompt: Find opinions on how people at all levels of society can contribute to feminism. Is it possible? Do some people say it is not?**

1. **Sonia Nieto – *Finding Joy in Teaching Students of Diverse Backgrounds: Culturally Responsive and Socially Just Practices in U.S. Classrooms* (Education)**

In an early passage, Nieto mentions research that shows over 80% of public schoolteachers in America are white. Nieto stresses the need for white teachers to consider the perspectives of nonwhite students. An inevitability of education in America, given this prevalence of white teachers, is white people teaching nonwhite people.

How is white school experienced by nonwhite students? Nieto cites professor Lilia Bartolomé, who believes “dehumanization happens when students are robbed of their language, culture, history, and values” (22), and a study showing “subtle daily insults that as a form of racism, support a racial and cultural hierarchy of minority inferiority” (131). Examples of this in the classroom might be texts that don’t originate from a nonwhite point of view, or courses with a focus on social and cultural issues that aren’t as vital to nonwhite communities, or which fail to immerse the class in nonwhite perspectives, or which simply don’t show a lot of respect for or inclusion of nonwhite voices, practices, habits of mind, or customs.

Nieto argues white teachers can be “like fish in the fishbowl, who may not realize they’re in the water – it’s just their environment” (140). Teachers can be ignorant of how *white* the world is for nonwhites, and how they can, unwittingly or otherwise, perpetuate a culture of “white is the norm.” One aspect of this book has to do with things teachers can do inside of the classroom. In many ways, she tells us, it starts with attitude. In a section entitled “Teaching From a Social Justice Perspective” Nieto says teachers should be multicultural in spirit, that is, permeable to the influence of others. “One also needs to become a *multicultural person*,” she writes, “rather than just being a *multicultural teacher*” (20).

**Personal Response Prompt: Have your educational experiences been like what Nieto describes – a culture of “white is the norm”? How about outside of school? What are some specific examples?**

**Research Prompt: Research what other people have to say about how education can be more inclusive. What are some of the strategies offered to teachers?**

1. **Tara Westover – *Educated: A Memoir* (Independence)**

As a student at Brigham Young University, Westover began to develop a worldview that conflicted with the values of her deeply conservative and very religious Mormon parents. This led to various confrontations – with one going so badly that she became permanently estranged from them. Telling us why she stood her ground during this conflict, Westover writes, “Everything I had worked for, all my years of study, had been to purchase for myself this one privilege: to see and experience more truths than those given to me by my father, and to use those truths to construct my own mind” (304). Throughout the book we get passages on how controlling her home life was. “My life was narrated for me by others,” she writes. “Their voices were forceful, empathetic, absolute. It had never occurred to me that my voice might be as strong as theirs” (197). Even as an adult, she tells us, “part of me will always believe – that my father’s words ought to be my own” (172). And this came at a cost; she says, discussing her differences with her family, “I had rejected some part of it; now it was rejecting me” (149). In one conversation her mother told her, “Talking to you, your reality is so *warped*” (292). Her grandfather, even, began to treat her differently; Westover writes, “I doubted whether, in the years he had left, I would be able to prove to him that I was not what my father said I was, that I was not a wicked thing” (321). She says of her family, “I’d wandered too far, changed too much, bore too little resemblance to the scabby-kneed girl they remembered as their sister” (293).

This led to feelings of isolation, of not belonging, of anxiety and sadness. After completing a fellowship at Harvard, and deciding to attend Cambridge and earn a doctorate, she asked herself, “All my studying, reading, thinking, traveling, had it transformed me into someone who no longer belonged anywhere?” (312). At Cambridge, she experienced insomnia, teeth grinding, migraines, breaking out in rashes, and having a panic attack (312-313). And she talks about being extremely uncomfortable with praise, and compliments. After a Cambridge professor told Westover she’d written the best essay he had read in thirty years, she writes about how “I could tolerate any form of cruelty better than kindness. Praise was a poison to me; I choked on it. I wanted the professor to shout at me…The ugliness of me had to be given expression” (240).

**Personal Response Prompt: Do you feel you have a worldview that conflicts with those of friends, family members, a spouse? What are the consequences of this?**

**Research Prompt: Find out how common this type of experience is – going out into the world, whether for school, work, or life in a new culture, and forming a value system that leads to conflict with those you know.**

1. **Reyna Grande – *A Dream Called Home* (Mentorship)**

Grande, who arrived in California after leaving a small village in Mexico at the age of nine, grew up in Los Angeles and did well enough at Pasadena City College to earn admission to UC Santa Cruz in 1996. This is where the book opens. “I was transferring to the University of California, Santa Cruz,” she writes, “leaving to pursue the wild dream of becoming the first in my family to earn a university degree” (3). A major theme of the book emerges right away: breaking cycles. “If I did things right,” she says, “I would one day break the cycle my family had been stuck in for generations – a cycle of poverty, hunger, and a lack of education” (8). Upon arrival she saw how white the campus was, and how wealthy the people seemed. Watching students moving in, she found herself wondering, “Did those students realize how lucky they were? I imagined myself in their place – at a farewell party showered by relatives with their congratulations and best wishes and I’m-so-proud-of-you’s” (13). Later she says, “Some students were in college thanks to their parents’ occupations. I was there in spite of mine” (102).

One of the major issues with being a “first-generation” college student, in other words the first person in your family to go to college, is the lack of a network of support as you navigate the confusing and overwhelming world of higher education. Grande was definitely in this category. She writes, “With my father’s third-grade education, and my mother barely managing to finish sixth grade at seventeen years old, the day I started junior high school I had surpassed my parents in terms of education” (20).

**Personal Response Prompt: Are instances in your life where you feel like you’re kind of “on your own,” with no one to guide you? Describe this situation.**

**Research Prompt: Look for other people who succeeded academically without a lot of mentorship or support from family. What were their struggles? How did they deal with it?**

1. **Puente Students – Responses to Jamaica Kincaid’s “Girl” (Gender Roles)**

In Spring, 2020, I passed out the poem “Girl,” by Jamaica Kincaid to my Puente students [a program that exists primarily in California community colleges to help underserved students graduate and get into four-year universities]. This poem has an Antiguan woman talking to a young girl and describing all the expectations of her. I had students read it, and talk about gender roles in their own lives.

Here are some responses. I typed them out exactly as they looked:

“This text is relatable mainly in the Hispanic culture. You are expected to be the perfect wife and stay home to do all the chores. When we date someone we are forced to always serve them a plate of food take it to the table and clean up after them. It gets frustrating because you feel like you have a child to take care of.”

“Gender roles are a means of placing rules that both genders must abide by to look perfect in the eyes of society. In the poem ‘Girl’ by Jamaica Kinkaid, we read all the different rules, and scenerios that this girl must follow in order to be a ‘women.’ Girls are conditioned to believe they are meant to do chores such as washing clothes and cooking. They say, ‘Wash the white clothes on Monday and put them on the stone heap; wash the color clothes on Tuesday and put them on the clotheslines to dry’ (1). Just like in the poem, they mention chores. Personally, I can agree with such gender roles being placed on me at home. Even for cooking, countless times I have had my mom, grandma and aunts tell me, ‘You need to start cooking, what is going to happen when you get married and have to cook for your husband.’ This shows that similar to the roles placed on the girl in the poem, it represents everyone that has had gender roles forced on them.”

“The poem ‘Girl’ by Jamaica Kinkaid is a poem that often showcases the theme of gender roles. A girl is being told to do many things and act as a woman should. I can greatly relate to this. Growing up as a female in a Mexican household, I was always told and taught to do and act in certain ways in respect to the male gender. I learned to cook not for myself, but for my future husband. I learned how to sew, not to fix my clothes but fix my husband’s. Through time I saw the gender role pop up and realized that it is all just for the opposite gender, to supply for them, and to support them. What about me? I definitely, understand the confusion expressed in the last line of the poem.”

“Coming from a traditional Mexican home, gender roles were often mentioned by my parents. For example, my parents would often tell my sister that she needs to learn how to cook and clean to prepare for when she gets married. While I cannot personally relate to the gender roles the narrator talks about, my girlfriend has often mentioned to me that her parents have asked her to sit more, ‘lady-like’ as a kid and to also learn to cook and clean so she can be a good wife. Another example from my experience with the gender roles mentioned in the text comes from having heard many girls in school talk about being restricted from wearing certain clothes by their parents because it is too revealing. This is an issue that almost all women experience, and one that often does not apply to men.”

“Nowadays the topic of gender roles has gotten more sensitive. We all want to be seen as equal but the truth is that might never happen. I can completely relate to the girl in the text. I am expected to be a lady and do everything around the house while my brother goes out and parties. I would complain but I’ve learned that later in life while I’m independant he will be struggling to do things on his own. In one way it helped me realize the future I want for my kids. Although my parents are old fashioned I’ll be the one to stop the idea that girls are supposed to do one thing and guys another (at least in my family.)”

“In my life I don’t have much of a specific gender role like the girl does in the story. I mean yes, I am supposed to learn how to cook, wash clothes, and all of that, but also my dad cooks, washes, folds clothes. We don’t have roles that only the guys or girls in my household is a mandatory thing to do. My mom has always told me a guy can do exactly what a girl can, just because they grab a broom means that’s going to turn them into a girl. For example, if my dad gets home before my mom, he will cook and clean so everything will be ready by the time she gets home.”

**Personal Response Prompt: Do you feel gender roles play a part in your life? What are they? Do they come from certain cultural expectations?**

**Research Prompt: Look at other responses to this poem, or research gender norms in American society today.**

1. **Suicide**

Did you know men commit suicide at 3.6 times the rate of women in America? This is true even though women are twice as likely to be diagnosed with depression and about 60% more likely to have an anxiety disorder.

Did you know that about 70% of all suicides in recent years have been white males, and that middle-aged white males have the highest rate of suicide in America?

Sources: American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, Mayo Clinic, National Institute of Mental Health

**Personal Response Prompt: Why do you think suicide is so much more prevalent among men than women in America? Why are whites so much more prevalent? Why middle-aged whites?**

**Research Prompt: Look at what people say the reasons are for this demographic being so heavily represented. Also, look at what is called “deaths of despair,” known as deaths related to drug-related illnesses. What do you find there?**

1. **Isabel Wilkerson – *Caste: the Origins of Our Discontent* (Racism)**

Wilkerson argues that America is arranged into a caste system, with rich whites on the top, working class whites in the middle, and nonwhites on the bottom. The system, which is centuries old, in her view depends on “stigmatizing those deemed inferior to justify the dehumanization necessary to keep the lowest-ranked people at the bottom and to rationalize the protocols of enforcement” (17). Stereotypes are created and maintained, therefore, to justify exclusion, thereby preserving the caste structure. She goes on to say this arrangement of American society is so old, and so embedded into our daily lives, that many of us do not even notice it. She writes, “Caste, like grammar, becomes an invisible guide not only to how we speak, but to how we process information, the autonomic calculations that figure into a sentence without our having to think about it” (18). She also claims “It is the worn groove of comforting routines and unthinking expectations, patterns of a social order that have been in place for so long it looks like the natural order of things” (70) and something that centuries ago banded together European immigrants, who coalesced into a general category called “White,” which had higher status than “Nonwhite” in America. She argues “Hostility toward the lowest caste became part of the initiation rite into citizenship in America” (50).

**Personal Response Prompt: Do you agree with Wilkerson’s perspective on the arrangement / structure of American society? What examples influence your opinion on this?**

**Research Prompt: Research stereotypes in America. Who is stigmatized, and how? What are the historical origins of them? Why do they seem to have been created?**

1. **Mara Lee Grayson – *Teaching Racial Literacy: Reflective Practices for Critical Writing* (Structural Racism)**

Grayson in her book states “Research results, such as statistics on societal problems like poverty, education, and the prison industrial complex, may make evident the extreme racial biases in long-standing social and governmental institutions” (35).

**Personal Response Prompt: Have you experienced or witnessed structural bias? What was the nature of it? What was its impact?**

**Research Prompt: Choose one of the societal problems she mentions in this short passage (Poverty, Education, Prison Industrial Complex). Try to conduct research which combines recent stories like news articles, with more academic studies on the history of this problem. Do you see evidence of racism? How has this impacted societal institutions? What does the research say?**