

Wealth, Labor, and Mobility

Below you will find five modules related to the intersections of race, labor, and economics. The essays and resources selected are included in *The 1619 Project* from *The New York Times Magazine* or identified as companions to the project by the module authors. These materials were created by law students at Howard University and the University of Miami.

1. “The Wealth Gap” by Trymaine Lee (pages 82–83)

Module Authors: Kelsey Johnson, Melissa Kanoff, Drew Lewis, Melissa Portes, and Jordan Strudwick

<p>Excerpt</p>	<p>“Today’s racial wealth gap is perhaps the most glaring legacy of American slavery and the violent economic dispossession that followed.”</p> <p>“The major way in which people have an opportunity to accumulate wealth is contingent on the wealth positions of their parents and their grandparents,’ (Duke University professor William A. Darity Jr.) says. “To the extent that blacks have the capacity to accumulate wealth, we have not had the ability to transfer the same kinds of resources across generations.”</p>
<p>Key Names, Dates, and Terms</p>	<p>Redlining, federal policy, state policy, exponential growth, the middle class, suburbs, credit, credit score, creditworthiness, home equity, mortgages, federally-backed mortgages, risk, gentrification, The Poor People’s March, black capitalism, immigration, land ownership, westward expansion, Work Projects Administration, New Deal, the Freedman’s Savings Bank, income vs. wealth, global perspectives, caste, reparations</p> <p>Higher education, student loan debt, education access, student loan crisis, civil rights, debt forgiveness, government’s role in higher education</p>
<p>Guiding Questions</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How much money was lost when the Freedman’s Savings Bank “failed” in 1874? What is the value of that amount in today’s currency? How did this loss affect the bank’s Black depositors? 2. How did the Black residents of the Greenwood neighborhood of Tulsa, Oklahoma, accumulate wealth before the 1921 race massacre? 3. What effect has violent terrorism from white supremacists had on the ability of Black people to build wealth? 4. Geographically, where are Black people most concentrated in the

	<p>United States, and why?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">5. Why are Black Americans ghettoized in similar ways in cities across the United States?6. Identify factors that influence the percentage of Black landowners in the United States compared to the percentage of white landowners.7. Discuss the effect of the subprime mortgage lending crisis of 2008 on Black families and its impact on white families.8. What is the average difference in public funding given to predominantly Black school districts compared to predominantly white school districts? Identify factors that influence any difference.9. What effect does going to an underfunded school have on a person's ability to build wealth? What effect does one's parent's wealth have on one's ability to build wealth?10. How much does debt from higher education loans contribute to the wealth gap for Black Americans? How does student loan debt adversely affect Black Americans who are seeking jobs or building wealth?11. What is the average net worth of a Black family where a household member has a college degree? What is the average net worth of a white family where household members do not hold a college degree? Identify factors that influence these statistics.12. Identify factors that influence the percentage of Black people that are underbanked compared to the percentage of underbanked white people.13. What is the gender pay gap between Black women and men? What is the gender pay gap between white women and men? Identify factors that influence these statistics.14. What is the racial wealth gap? What is the racial income gap? Identify factors that influence these statistics.15. Identify factors that influence the global Black-white wealth gap.16. Should the wealth gap be considered a civil rights issue? If so, how can it be remedied by our legislature, or by cases heard by the
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	<p>Supreme Court?</p> <p>17. What effects do higher rates of interaction with the criminal justice system or a criminal record have on the ability to build wealth?</p>
<p>Additional Resources</p>	<p>Articles: “Growing Inequality and Racial Economic Gaps” by Thomas W. Mitchell</p> <p>“The Wealth Gap: Through the Lens of Governmental Policies and Racial Inequality in Housing” by Tara Carone</p> <p>Books: Anderson, Claud. <i>Black Labor, White Wealth: The Search for Power and Economic Justice</i>. Powernomics Corporation of America, 1994.</p> <p>Baradaran, Mehrsa. <i>The Color of Money: Black Banks and the Racial Wealth Gap</i>. Belknap Press, 2017.</p> <p>Rothstein, Richard. <i>The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America</i>. Liveright, 2017.</p> <p>Williams, Eric. <i>Capitalism & Slavery</i>. University of North Carolina Press, 1994.</p> <p>Films & Videos:</p> <p>Explained Racial Wealth Gap published by Netflix</p> <p>How America Created Its Shameful Wealth Gap Robert Reich published by Robert Reich</p> <p>Richard Rothstein, “The Color of Law” (with Ta-Nehisi Coates) published by Politics and Prose</p> <p>The Color of Money published by Economic Policy Institute</p> <p>The Subprime Swindle: Economic War on Black America published by The Nation</p> <p>13th. Directed by Ava DuVernay, Kandoo Films, 2016.</p>

2. “Capitalism” by Matthew Desmond (pages 30–40)

Module Authors: Myles Crandall, Bradford Ellison, Jordan Gary, Maddie Seales, and Jordan Strudwick

<p>Excerpt</p>	<p>“Given the choice between modernity and barbarism, prosperity and poverty, lawfulness and cruelty, democracy and totalitarianism, America chose all of the above.”</p> <p>“It is the culture of acquiring wealth without work, growing at all costs and abusing the powerless. It is the culture that brought us the Panic of 1837, the stock-market crash of 1929 and the recession of 2008. It is the culture that has produced staggering inequality and undignified working conditions. If today America promotes a particular kind of low-road capitalism — a union-busting capitalism of poverty wages, gig jobs and normalized insecurity; a winner-take-all capitalism of stunning disparities not only permitting but awarding financial rule-bending; a racist capitalism that ignores the fact that slavery didn’t just deny black freedom but built white fortunes, originating the black-white wealth gap that annually grows wider — one reason is that American capitalism was founded on the lowest road there is.”</p>
<p>Key Names, Dates, and Terms</p>	<p>Capitalist society, unions (unionization), regulation, American slavery, large-scale cultivation of cotton, worker productivity, data-analysis, violence, workplace supervision, profit, ‘conditions of scarcity and uncertainty’, mortgages, globalized financial markets, bank loans and bonds, credit, 1933 Glass-Steagall Act</p>
<p>Guiding Questions</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What distinguishes capitalism in America from capitalism in other nations? 2. Explain causation and connections linking slavery to modern banking/finance. 3. Has the accumulation of American property, including land and wealth, required violence? 4. How have laws supported—or challenged—American capitalism? 5. What jobs exist for lawyers today? How does legal work protect inequality? How can legal work protect human rights?

Additional Resources	<p>Articles: “Whiteness as Property” by Cheryl I. Harris</p> <p>Books: Blackmon, Douglas. <i>Slavery by Another Name: The Re-Enslavement of Black Americans from the Civil War to World War II</i>. Anchor, 2008.</p> <p>Isabel, Wilkerson. <i>Caste: The Origin of Our Discontents</i>. Random House, 2020.</p> <p>James, C.L.R. <i>The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L’Overture and the San Domingo Revolution</i>. Vintage, 1989.</p> <p>Karakatsanis, Alec. <i>Usual Cruelty: The Complicity of Lawyers in the Criminal Injustice System</i>. The New Press, 2019.</p> <p>Lester, Julius. <i>To Be A Slave</i>. Puffin Books, 2000.</p> <p>Rosenthal, Caitlin. <i>Accounting for Slavery</i>. Harvard University Press, 2018.</p> <p>Films & Videos: Slavery by Another Name. Directed by Samuel Pollard, PBS, 2012.</p> <p>13th. Directed by Ava DuVernay, Kandoo Films, 2016.</p> <p>Podcasts: “Zombies” episode of Throughline</p>
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3. “Sugar” by Khalil Gibran Muhammad (pages 70–77)

Module Authors: Myles Crandall, Brittany Frizzelle, David Petrantoni, and Jordan Strudwick

<p>Excerpt</p>	<p>““There was direct trade among the colonies and between the colonies and Europe, but much of the Atlantic trade was triangular: enslaved people from Africa; sugar from the West Indies and Brazil; money and manufactures from Europe,” writes the Harvard historian Walter Johnson in his 1999 book, ‘Soul by Soul: Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market.’ ‘People were traded along the bottom of the triangle; profits would stick at the top.’”</p> <p>“From slavery to freedom, many black Louisianans found that the crushing work of sugar cane remained mostly the same. Even with Reconstruction delivering civil rights for the first time, white planters continued to dominate landownership. Freedmen and freedwomen had little choice but to live in somebody’s old slave quarters. As new wage earners, they negotiated the best terms they could, signed labor contracts for up to a year and moved frequently from one plantation to another in search of a life whose daily rhythms beat differently than before. And yet, even compared with sharecropping on cotton plantations, (Whitney Plantation Museum executive director Ashley) Rogers said, ‘sugar plantations did a better job preserving racial hierarchy.’”</p>
<p>Key Names, Dates, and Terms</p>	<p>Thibodaux Massacre (1887), Queen Sugar, United States Sugar Corporation, subsidies, torture, agrotourism, sugar processing, debt peonage, Whitney Plantation, West Indies, Angola (Louisiana State Penitentiary), prison labor, Toussaint L’Ouverture (1743- 1803), Jean Jacques Dessalines (1758-1806), sugar rebels</p>
<p>Guiding Questions</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Assume that, six generations ago, Adam’s ancestor was an enslaved African harvesting sugar, and Eve’s ancestor was an enslaving European forcing Adam’s ancestor to harvest sugar (and accruing the large financial benefits). How do you imagine the effects of the relative positions of their ancestors six generations ago would manifest in their lives today? 2. What did Marc Aronson and Marina Budhos mean when they wrote in <i>Sugar Changed the World</i> that “The true Age of Sugar had begun – and it was doing more to reshape the world than any ruler, empire or war had ever done?” 3. With respect to the impact on African and Afro-descendant workers,

	<p>what modern analogies exist in regards to the production of sugar in the late 18th through the early 20th century?</p>
<p>Additional Resources</p>	<p>Articles: “For Black Farmers of Acadiana, ‘Queen Sugar’ is not Just a TV show ... It's a Way of Life” by Herman Fuselier</p> <p>“The Legacy of Racial Slavery: Free Enterprise and Forced Labor in Florida in the 1940s” by Jerrell H. Shofner</p> <p>Books: Aptheker, Herbert. <i>American Negro Slave Revolts</i>. International Publishers, 1983.</p> <p>Aronson, Marc and Marina Budhos. <i>Sugar Changed the World: A Story of Magic, Spice, Slavery, Freedom, and Science</i>. Clarion Books, 2017.</p> <p>Follett, Richard. <i>The Sugar Masters: Planters and Slaves in Louisiana's Cane World, 1820- 1860</i>. LSU Press, 2007.</p> <p>James, C.L.R. <i>The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution</i>. Vintage, 1989.</p> <p>Johnson, Walter. <i>Soul by Soul: Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market</i>. Harvard University Press, 1999.</p> <p>Wilkinson, Alec. <i>Big Sugar: Seasons in the Canefields of Florida</i>. Alfred A. Knopf, 1989.</p> <p>Williams, Eric. <i>Capitalism and Slavery</i>. University of North Carolina Press, 1994.</p> <p>Online Resources: “Our History” published by U.S. Sugar</p> <p>Whitney Plantation</p>

4. “Fabric of Modernity” by Mehrsa Baradaran (page 36)

Module Author: Ariana Aboulafia

Excerpt	“From the first decades of the 1800s, during the height of the trans-Atlantic cotton trade, the sheer size of the market and the escalating number of disputes between counterparties was such that courts and lawyers began to articulate and codify the common-law standards regarding contracts ... Today, law students still study some of these pivotal cases as they learn doctrines like foreseeability, mutual mistake and damages.”
Key Names, Dates, and Terms	damages, futures contracts, foreseeability, mutual mistake contracts, contract law
Guiding Questions	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How is the legacy of slavery present in contract law? 2. Should the doctrines that derived from the cotton trade be changed? Are the doctrines themselves problematic? 3. Do you think the history of these doctrines should be taught in law school? What would be the best way to teach them?

5. “Traffic” by Kevin M. Kruse (pages 48–49)

Module Authors: Rachel May, Anastasia Pierik, Maddie Seales, Asena Tui’one

Excerpt	<p>“In Atlanta, as in dozens of cities across America, daily congestion is a direct consequence of a century-long effort to segregate the races.”</p> <p>“Before the Civil War, white masters kept enslaved African-Americans close at hand to coerce their labor and guard against revolts. But with the abolition of slavery, the spatial relationship was reversed. Once they had no need to keep constant watch over African-Americans, whites wanted them out of sight.”</p> <p>“As the new suburbs ballooned in size, traffic along the poorly placed highways became worse and worse. The obvious solution was mass transit – buses, light rail and trains that would more efficiently link the suburbs and the city – but that, too, faced opposition, largely for racial reasons. The white suburbanites had purposefully left the problems of the central city behind and worried that mass transit would bring them back.”</p>
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Key Names, Dates, and Terms	Segregation, interstate highways, mass transit, restrictive covenants, suburbs, Atlanta, 1950s, 1960s, urban planning, urban renewal, displacement, gentrification, white flight, inner cities, redlining
Guiding Questions	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How has the law been used to keep Black people “out of sight”? Does mass incarceration factor into efforts to keep Black people “out of sight” in the United States? 2. How does climate change factor into debates about funding mass transit in order to reduce highway traffic? Will climate change alter people's behavior and reluctance to fund mass transit? Has it already changed people’s behavior with regard to this? How do the issues of climate change, racism, and white supremacy intersect? 3. Is the reluctance of white suburbanites to fund mass transit an example of people voting against their interests? Why or why not?
Additional Resources	<p>Books: Davis, Angela. <i>Are Prisons Obsolete?</i> Seven Stories Press, 2003.</p> <p>Rothstein, Richard. <i>The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America.</i> Liveright, 2017.</p> <p>Legal Cases: Shelley v. Kraemer, 334 U.S. 1 (1948)</p> <p>Online Resources: “Racial Exclusion Through Crime-Free Housing Ordinances” by Deborah N. Archer</p>

The 1619 Project Law School Initiative is a partnership of the Pulitzer Center, Howard University School of Law, and University of Miami School of Law. The Initiative is also part of the Racial Justice initiative by the Squire Patton Boggs Foundation and its Deans’ Circle. You can find more educational resources at www.pulitzercenter.org/1619