1619 Project Questions

Chapter 1: Democracy

1. How do the stories presented in***The 1619 Project*** compare to the stories you grew up hearing about the origins of slavery and its modern day impacts?
2. The importance of semantics. James Madison ran a slave labor camp, not a “plantation.” In other places, they are called “forced labor camps.” Editors have used the term “enslaved person,” rather than slave. Does this help you to reframe your thinking? Has reading this changed your opinion of the early founding fathers, many of whom were slaveholders?
3. Hannah-Jones claims that one of the primary reasons some colonists decided to declare independence was to preserve the institution of slavery. The issue of slavery turned a lot of southerners who were on the fence about revolution into patriots who favored revolution. Would the US have continued to be part of the British Empire if it hadn’t been for slavery?
4. The short time period of Reconstruction (1865-1877) is pivotal in black history. The role of the U.S. Constitution is important to black Americans’ understanding of citizenship. What difference did the adoption of the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments to the U.S. Constitution make to black Americans, then and now?

Chapter 2: Race

1. Black people who had served their county in WWII seemed to face worse treatment because they were in uniform. How did their wearing a uniform represent a threat to the status quo?
2. Because the law traced a child’s status to the mother, rather than the father as in England, black women became exceedingly valuable as “producers” of future “property.” What consequences did this have for black family life?  Do we see consequences today from this?
3. Can we trace requirements to list race on marriage licenses back to laws prohibiting interracial marriage?
4. Hannah-Jones discusses the development of the idea that black women were “hypersexual.”  This led to laws that failed to protect women, essentially saying that black women could not experience rape.  Does this attitude still affect prosecutions of sexual assaults in the U.S. today?

Poems:

“The White Lion”

“Daughters of Azimuth”

“Loving Me”

“Conjured”

“A Ghazalled Sentence After “My People … Hold On’”

1. These chapters include five original documents, or poems, from the time period. How did reading them affect you? Which made the most impression on you?

Additional questions if time remains

1. What surprised you about what we have read so far?
2. This chapter has plenty of irony. Enslaved people built the White House, and the US Capitol, and put the Statue of Freedom on the Capitol dome. The people who wrote “all men are created equal” didn’t believe it applied to black people. Are there more examples?
3. Seasoning – turning human beings into property by stripping them of every element that made them individuals. They were forced to stop speaking their native tongues and practicing their native religions. Have you heard the term seasoning used in this way?
4. Did this chapter make you think differently about fashion, hairstyles, and names given to children?
   1. Fashion and style as a means of self-expression. Response to having been stripped of identity.
   2. Black naming practices as an act of resistance. Parents Giving children names that they create, that are neither European nor African, is an act of self-determination.