



## Recentering Slavery in American Historical Discourse: An Appraisal of The 1619 Project

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**ABSTRACT** - Historical reinterpretation remains central to debates on national identity, public memory, and the politics of historical narration, particularly where foundational national histories are contested. Within this context, this paper appraises *The 1619 Project* as a major public history intervention that has stimulated renewed interrogation of the historical foundations of the United States by repositioning slavery at the centre of national historical discourse. The paper examined the central historical arguments advanced in *The 1619 Project* and assessed their contribution to the reinterpretation of American historical foundations; evaluated its practical and educational relevance in promoting historical consciousness and influencing public and academic discourse on slavery and racial inequality; and assessed its scholarly strengths and criticisms in determining its significance within recent historiography. The appraisal was anchored on Critical Race Theory, which provided the analytical basis for understanding the historical continuity of racial structures and institutional inequality. Analytical review and critical appraisal method was adopted through systematic examination of recent peer-reviewed scholarly literature published between 2020 and 2026. The appraisal revealed that *The 1619 Project* has significantly reshaped historical debates by challenging dominant narratives that privilege 1776 as the singular point of American national origin, while also demonstrating substantial pedagogical relevance through its influence on curriculum development and public historical engagement. The appraisal further established that although some historical claims remain contested, the project's broader contribution lies in its ability to provoke sustained critical historical enquiry and public reflection. The appraisal concluded that *The 1619 Project* remains an influential intervention in contemporary historical discourse. It recommended balanced curricular integration, sustained archival research into contested claims, and practical application of its historical insights in public policy and institutional reform initiatives.

**KEYWORDS:** The 1619 Project, Historical Reinterpretation, Public History, Critical Race Theory, Slavery, Historiography, Historical Consciousness, Racial Inequality



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**1. INTRODUCTION**

Since its publication by The New York Times Magazine in August 2019 and its later expansion into *The 1619 Project: A New Origin Story* in 2021, *The 1619 Project* has remained one of the most discussed public history interventions in recent times. Edited by Nikole Hannah-Jones, the project advances the argument that the arrival of approximately twenty enslaved Africans in the English colony of Virginia in August 1619 marked a foundational moment in the historical development of the United States. This framing has generated sustained scholarly debate because it relocates historical emphasis from 1776 to 1619 and asks whether the political, economic, and social institutions of the United States can be properly understood without placing slavery at the center of historical inquiry. An appraisal of the project begins with recognition of its substantial intervention in public historical discourse, particularly its success in drawing broad public attention to the enduring consequences of racial slavery in the United States (Pickup & Southall, 2022).

The practical significance of the project is reflected in both public engagement statistics and educational uptake. Within months of its release, the project's essays were adopted in thousands of classrooms across the United States through the curriculum developed in partnership with the Pulitzer Center. By 2021, educational materials linked to the project had reportedly reached more than 4,500 schools, a figure that demonstrates unusual penetration for a historical publication outside standard academic textbook channels. Its expanded book edition won the 2022 National Book Award recognition and further strengthened its academic visibility. Such institutional reception points to the project's success in forcing renewed attention to slavery's place in American historical memory. From an appraisal standpoint, this is one of its strongest achievements: it succeeded in moving historical interpretation from specialist academic circles into classrooms, policy discussions, and national media debate in ways that few historical publications have managed in recent decades (Welsh, 2024).

The project's strongest contribution lies in its insistence that slavery should not be treated as a peripheral chapter in American history. Through essays connecting plantation slavery to present disparities in health care, urban development, incarceration, and wealth accumulation, it presses readers to confront measurable historical continuities. For instance, the Federal Reserve's 2022 Survey of Consumer Finances showed that median white household wealth remained nearly six times that of Black households, a disparity many scholars continue to connect to historical exclusion from property ownership, educational access, and labor protections. The project's use of such historical continuity offers a persuasive appraisal of how unresolved historical systems

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continue to shape present institutional outcomes. This grounding in observable social indicators gives the work practical relevance beyond historical interpretation and positions it as an applied historical intervention rather than an abstract narrative exercise.

Case studies within the project reinforce this relevance. Its examination of medical exploitation draws attention to examples such as the Tuskegee Syphilis Study and disparities in maternal mortality among Black women, where data from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention continue to show Black maternal mortality rates at nearly three times those of white women in recent reporting. The project's ability to connect historical systems of racial hierarchy to current health outcomes demonstrates methodological strength in public-facing historical analysis. Such application gives it unusual utility for scholars in history, sociology, political science, public health, and education, making it more than a journalistic publication. It functions as a reference point for cross-disciplinary inquiry into institutional inequality.

Scholarly appraisal also requires acknowledgment of the project's limits. Critics such as Michelle M. Wright (2020) have argued that emphasizing 1619 as a singular point of national origin risks narrowing the broader historical field by giving insufficient attention to Indigenous histories and alternative Black diasporic trajectories. Similarly, Sean Wilentz has questioned some of the project's causal claims, particularly regarding slavery as a principal motivation for the American Revolution. These criticisms are important because they remind readers that public history initiatives must balance interpretive force with historical precision. Yet even these critiques indirectly affirm the project's significance. The intensity of scholarly response reflects the extent to which it has reshaped debate about historical method, evidence, and public memory (Wright, 2020; Wilentz, 2021).

From an appraisal perspective, *The 1619 Project* deserves recognition for compelling both scholars and the public to revisit established narratives with greater scrutiny. Its greatest strength is not that every interpretive claim has achieved universal scholarly agreement, but that it has reopened historical inquiry into slavery's foundational role with unusual public force. In this respect, it stands as an important intervention in twenty-first-century historiography and remains a major reference point for evaluating how history is written, taught, and contested.

## 2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The publication of *The 1619 Project* by Hannah-Jones (2021) generated sustained debate within historical and educational discourse because of its attempt to reposition slavery as central to the historical development of the United States. While the project has attracted substantial academic

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attention, much of the existing literature remains polarised between strong endorsement of its revisionist intervention and criticism of some of its historical interpretations. Existing studies have largely concentrated on isolated dimensions of the project, such as its pedagogical implications in social studies education (Pickup & Southall, 2022), its role in transmedia historical communication (Chalikiopoulou & Veglis, 2024), and specific historiographical controversies surrounding its foundational claims (Welsh, 2024; Wilentz, 2021).

Although these contributions have enriched understanding of the project, they have not sufficiently provided a balanced analytical appraisal that integrates its historical arguments, practical relevance, educational significance, and broader public history implications within a unified evaluative framework. This fragmented treatment creates an intellectual gap in current discourse, particularly as debates surrounding historical reinterpretation increasingly require studies capable of interrogating both the strengths and limitations of public historical interventions with methodological precision. The absence of such integrated appraisal weakens efforts to properly assess the project's contribution to recent historical thought and its implications for historical consciousness.

A further problem lies in the limited application of coherent theoretical frameworks in evaluating *The 1619 Project*. While scholars have debated its claims extensively, relatively few recent studies have systematically examined the project through Critical Race Theory as a framework for assessing its explanatory value concerning historical continuity and institutional racial inequality (Delgado & Stefancic, 2023). In addition, there remains inadequate synthesis of empirical and conceptual findings capable of clarifying whether the project should be understood primarily as a contested historical text, an educational intervention, or a significant public history contribution. This paper addressed these gaps by offering an analytical appraisal that critically examines the project's central historical arguments, evaluates its practical and educational relevance, and assesses its strengths and criticisms within recent historiographical debate. By integrating conceptual review, empirical evidence, and theoretical analysis, the paper provides a balanced assessment that contributes to clearer understanding of *The 1619 Project's* significance in shaping historical reinterpretation and public engagement with questions of slavery, memory, and racial inequality.

### 3. AIM AND OBJECTIVES OF THE PAPER

The aim of this paper was to critically appraise *The 1619 Project* by examining its historical arguments, scholarly relevance, and practical significance in reshaping public understanding of American history, with particular attention to its contribution to historical discourse, educational

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engagement, and debates surrounding the interpretation of slavery as foundational to the development of the United States.

The specific objectives of this paper were to:

1. Examine the central historical arguments advanced in The 1619 Project and assess their contribution to the reinterpretation of American historical foundations.
2. Evaluate the practical and educational relevance of The 1619 Project in promoting historical consciousness and influencing public and academic discourse on slavery and racial inequality.
3. Assess the scholarly strengths and criticisms of The 1619 Project in order to determine its significance as a public history intervention in recent historiography.

#### **4. METHODOLOGY**

This paper adopted an analytical review method, specifically a critical appraisal approach, to examine *The 1619 Project* through systematic interrogation of existing academic literature, empirical evidence, and theoretical arguments relevant to its historical claims, educational relevance, and historiographical significance. The analytical review method is a recognised qualitative research approach used for evaluating published knowledge by synthesising, interpreting, and critically assessing existing studies in order to generate informed judgement on a given subject. Unlike descriptive literature review methods that primarily summarise previous works, analytical appraisal requires close examination of arguments, methodological positions, evidentiary foundations, and scholarly debates in order to identify areas of convergence, divergence, strengths, limitations, and implications for knowledge development. Recent methodological studies emphasise that a critical analytical review is particularly appropriate where the objective is to assess contested intellectual positions and generate evaluative conclusions grounded in comparative interpretation rather than primary field data collection (Barry et al., 2022; Al-Naabi et al., 2026). This approach was considered most suitable for the present paper because *The 1619 Project* is itself a contested historical and public intellectual intervention requiring interpretive assessment rather than experimental or survey-based measurement.

The criteria guiding this analytical appraisal were drawn from established standards for critical review methodology. First, the method required source relevance, ensuring that only recent peer-

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reviewed academic works directly addressing *The 1619 Project*, public history, historiographical revisionism, racial historical analysis, and critical race interpretation were selected for review. Second, credibility and traceability formed an essential criterion, which restricted evidence to verifiable scholarly publications from 2020 to 2026. Third, analytical depth was applied by interrogating authorial assumptions, evidentiary claims, theoretical positioning, and practical implications of reviewed studies rather than merely reproducing their conclusions. Fourth, comparative synthesis was employed to identify consistencies and disagreements across the literature, enabling balanced appraisal of both supportive and critical positions.

Finally, theoretical alignment was used as a criterion to assess whether empirical and conceptual findings cohered with the adopted framework of Critical Race Theory. These criteria reflect current methodological recommendations that critical review should involve systematic selection, evaluative scrutiny, interpretive synthesis, and reflexive judgement to ensure rigour and transparency in non-empirical scholarly inquiry (Tang et al., 2025; Barry et al., 2022).

The adoption of this methodology is justified by the nature and objectives of the paper. Since the paper sought to appraise the historical arguments advanced in *The 1619 Project*, evaluate its practical and educational significance, and determine its place in recent historiographical debates, a field-based empirical design would have been inadequate for capturing the breadth of intellectual discourse surrounding the subject. The analytical review method enabled systematic engagement with multiple scholarly perspectives while allowing critical examination of the project's strengths, criticisms, and broader implications. It also provided a flexible framework for integrating conceptual review, empirical synthesis, and theoretical interpretation into a coherent appraisal. This aligns with recent methodological arguments that analytical review is especially appropriate for papers concerned with assessing influential public intellectual works whose significance lies in interpretive impact, academic contestation, and conceptual contribution rather than measurable experimental outcomes (Al-Naabi et al., 2026). By adopting this approach, the paper was able to produce a balanced and academically grounded evaluation of *The 1619 Project*, consistent with the paper's objective of offering an informed appraisal of its relevance to historical reinterpretation and public discourse.

## 5. LITERATURE REVIEW

The relevant literature were reviewed following the aim and objectives of the paper under conceptual review, empirical review and theoretical framework as follows:

## Conceptual Review

### The 1619 Project

The 1619 Project has attracted substantial scholarly attention since its publication because it advances a distinct interpretation of American historical origins by positioning the arrival of enslaved Africans in Virginia in 1619 as a foundational moment in the making of the United States. Scholarly interpretations of the concept vary according to disciplinary orientation. Wright (2020) defines the 1619 Project as a public historical narrative that seeks to relocate American national memory around the historical centrality of slavery, but she argues that its framing risks reducing broader Black diasporic and Indigenous histories to a singular origin claim. This critique draws attention to the limits of historical compression when major historical developments are anchored to one symbolic date.

Pickup and Southall (2022) approach the concept from educational discourse, describing it as a pedagogical intervention that has altered debates on how race, democracy, and historical consciousness should be taught in social studies education. Their position emphasizes its utility as a curricular resource capable of provoking critical engagement with contested historical narratives. Chalikiopoulou and Veglis (2024) extend this interpretation by viewing the project as an example of transmedia public history, arguing that its significance lies not only in historical reinterpretation but also in the innovative use of journalism, digital storytelling, and educational dissemination to shape public memory.

Welsh (2024), however, situates the project within a longer historiographical tradition, maintaining that its strongest contribution is its revival of historical debate over slavery's structural role in shaping American political development rather than the novelty of its claims. Interrogating these positions reveals a point of convergence: despite disagreement over its historical framing, scholars largely acknowledge that the 1619 Project has reconfigured discussions about race and national identity in ways few recent historical interventions have achieved.

For the purpose of this paper, the 1619 Project is adopted as a revisionist public history initiative that critically reinterprets American historical development by centering the institution and legacy of slavery as a formative force in shaping the nation's political, economic, and social structures. This definition is preferred because it captures both its historiographical ambition and its practical role in reshaping historical discourse without overstating the finality of its claims.

**"Recentring Slavery in American Historical Discourse: An Appraisal of The 1619 Project "****The Central Historical Arguments Advanced in *The 1619 Project* and Their Contribution to the Reinterpretation of American Historical Foundations**

The central historical argument advanced in *The 1619 Project* is that the arrival of enslaved Africans in the English colony of Virginia in August 1619 should be treated as a defining moment in the historical development of the United States, requiring a reassessment of the dominant national narrative that traditionally privileges 1776 as the foundational date of American nationhood. Hannah-Jones (2021) contends that the political, legal, and economic institutions of the United States cannot be fully understood without acknowledging slavery as a constitutive force rather than an incidental contradiction within the American democratic experiment. This intervention has generated one of the most sustained historical debates of the past decade because it does not merely add slavery to the historical record; it proposes a reordering of interpretive priorities in understanding American development.

A major contribution of this argument lies in its challenge to celebratory interpretations of American exceptionalism. Traditional historical narratives often foreground constitutionalism, republican ideals, and revolutionary resistance to British rule as the primary basis of American identity. *The 1619 Project* disputes this hierarchy by asserting that racial slavery was embedded in the economic and political architecture of the nation from its earliest colonial period. Wilentz (2021) acknowledges that while aspects of this argument are open to historical contestation, the project effectively compelled renewed attention to slavery's centrality in state formation. This intervention has encouraged historians to revisit questions surrounding labor exploitation, property law, and constitutional compromise with greater analytical depth.

The project's treatment of capitalism as historically tied to plantation slavery represents another significant reinterpretive claim. Baptist (2020) argues that the forced labor system of the antebellum South was central to the expansion of American capitalism and industrialization, particularly through cotton production. This argument aligns with one of the project's principal claims that modern American economic prosperity cannot be detached from enslaved labor. Census-based historical estimates indicate that by 1860, cotton constituted nearly 57 percent of total United States exports, underscoring the degree to which the national economy depended on slavery. By foregrounding these economic realities, the project redirects attention from abstract constitutional ideals to material historical structures.

Case studies reinforce this historical reinterpretation. The project's examination of housing discrimination traces connections between slavery, Reconstruction-era dispossession, redlining practices, and present racial wealth disparities. Darity and Mullen (2020) demonstrate that

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median white household wealth in the United States remains significantly higher than that of Black households due largely to historical barriers to asset accumulation. This empirical continuity supports the project's insistence that slavery's effects are institutional rather than merely historical memory.

The project's reinterpretation of democratic development is also significant. It argues that African American resistance to slavery and racial exclusion strengthened democratic ideals in ways often omitted from conventional historical narratives. Black activism during Reconstruction, the Civil Rights Movement, and contemporary voting rights struggles are presented as evidence that democratic expansion in the United States has often emerged through Black resistance to exclusionary structures. This argument has influenced recent historical discussions concerning whose struggles should occupy the center of democratic history.

Critics have challenged certain causal claims, particularly the assertion that preserving slavery was a major motive for the American Revolution. Oakes (2021) argues that available documentary evidence does not sustain this interpretation with sufficient precision. Yet this criticism does not diminish the broader historical contribution of the project. Instead, it demonstrates that the project succeeded in provoking rigorous reassessment of historical evidence and interpretive frameworks.

Its most important contribution to historical reinterpretation is therefore methodological. It has compelled historians, educators, and students to revisit inherited narratives with greater attention to silenced historical experiences. In this regard, *The 1619 Project* has reshaped historical debate by insisting that the history of slavery is inseparable from the history of American freedom.

**The Practical and Educational Relevance of *The 1619 Project* in Promoting Historical Consciousness and Influencing Public and Academic Discourse on Slavery and Racial Inequality**

The practical and educational relevance of *The 1619 Project* is evident in its exceptional capacity to move historical discourse beyond academic circles into classrooms, policy discussions, and public consciousness. Few historical interventions in recent years have achieved comparable educational reach. Since its release, instructional materials linked to the project have been incorporated into thousands of American schools through curricular partnerships and independent academic adoption. Pickup and Southall (2022) observe that the project introduced new frameworks for teaching historical inquiry by encouraging students to critically assess

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historical evidence rather than passively accept established national narratives. Other relevance are identified and discussed as follows:

i. ***Ability to stimulate critical historical consciousness***

Its educational value lies in its ability to stimulate critical historical consciousness. Historical consciousness refers to the capacity to understand present social conditions through informed engagement with historical processes. *The 1619 Project* achieves this by connecting slavery to current institutional disparities. In educational settings, this connection encourages analytical reasoning about causality, continuity, and historical accountability.

A practical example can be seen in public health education. Essays within the project examining medical exploitation have been used in courses addressing racial disparities in healthcare delivery. Washington's historical analysis of medical experimentation on Black Americans continues to inform discussions of structural mistrust in healthcare systems. Current disparities reinforce this relevance: Hoyert (2023) reports that Black maternal mortality rates remain nearly three times those of white women in the United States. Such statistical continuity provides practical educational evidence of the project's central claims.

ii. ***Legal and civic education***

Another important area of relevance is legal and civic education. The project's treatment of criminal justice history has informed university-level discussions on incarceration, policing, and constitutional rights. Alexander's framework regarding racialized mass incarceration has often been paired with *The 1619 Project* in law and public policy courses to illustrate historical continuities between slavery, convict leasing, segregation, and modern penal structures. This pedagogical application demonstrates the project's utility in connecting historical analysis with contemporary legal concerns.

iii. ***Influenced on public discourse***

The project has also significantly influenced public discourse. Academic forums, book symposia, and historical roundtables generated by its publication have expanded debate about race and memory. Welsh (2024) notes that the project revitalized public engagement with historical interpretation by making debates over evidence, national identity, and democratic development

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accessible to wider audiences. Practical examples extend to museum programming and public memorialization initiatives. Institutions such as historical museums and archival exhibitions have increasingly incorporated themes raised by the project into interpretive programming. This shift reflects its impact on how public history is curated and presented.

iv. **Publishing trends**

The project's influence is also measurable through publishing trends. Following its release, academic and trade publications addressing race, memory, and slavery experienced substantial increases in readership and classroom adoption. This indicates that the project catalyzed sustained public interest in historical inquiry. Its greatest practical strength is that it transforms history into a framework for understanding current institutional outcomes. Discussions of educational inequality, housing segregation, healthcare access, and voting rights become more analytically grounded when situated within the longer historical trajectories highlighted by the project.

Though some critics argue that the project's framing may encourage ideological polarization, this concern should be weighed against its substantial educational benefit. Controversy itself often stimulates critical engagement. By compelling students and readers to interrogate historical claims, compare interpretations, and assess evidence, the project advances historical literacy. Its practical relevance therefore lies not only in what it teaches but in how it teaches: through inquiry, contestation, and evidence-based reflection. This pedagogical contribution has made it one of the most influential historical teaching resources of the present decade.

**The Scholarly Strengths and Criticisms of *The 1619 Project* in Determining Its Significance as a Public History Intervention in Recent Historiography**

The significance of *The 1619 Project* as a public history intervention can best be assessed through balanced evaluation of its strengths and criticisms. Its principal strength lies in its ability to bridge historical research and public engagement. Public history often struggles to combine analytical rigor with accessibility. *The 1619 Project* succeeded in reaching broad audiences while sustaining serious historical debate.

Its interdisciplinary structure is one of its strongest features. By combining historical essays, literary reflections, journalism, and cultural commentary, it reaches audiences beyond traditional academic readership. Chalikiopoulou and Veglis (2024) identify this format as an important

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development in transmedia historical communication, demonstrating how digital and print storytelling can expand public engagement with historical analysis.

Another major strength is its success in recovering neglected historical experiences. Traditional narratives have often marginalized the role of enslaved Africans and Black resistance in shaping American institutions. The project addresses this omission by centering these experiences as essential rather than supplementary. This repositioning aligns with broader historiographical shifts toward inclusive historical interpretation. Its practical methodological strength lies in historical application. Rather than discussing slavery solely as a completed institution, the project examines its continuing structural effects. This approach has encouraged more historically grounded analyses of inequality in economics, healthcare, and criminal justice.

The project's capacity to provoke national debate is itself evidence of significance. Few public history initiatives have generated responses from historians, political theorists, educators, and legal analysts at such scale. The intensity of engagement confirms its impact on historical discourse. However, its criticisms are substantial and deserve careful appraisal. The most prominent concerns involve evidentiary overreach. Oakes (2021) and Wilentz (2021) argue that some claims, particularly regarding slavery's role in motivating the American Revolution, extend beyond available documentary support. These critiques emphasize the need for precision when translating historical interpretation for public audiences.

Another criticism concerns selective framing. Wright (2020) argues that emphasizing 1619 risks reducing broader historical trajectories, including Indigenous histories and global Black experiences, into a narrowly national origin framework. This critique is important because public historical narratives carry significant interpretive authority. A practical case illustrating these tensions emerged in curriculum disputes across several American states, where proposed classroom use of project materials generated legislative opposition. These controversies demonstrate both the project's influence and the challenges facing public historical interventions that confront contested national memory.

There is also concern regarding interpretive compression. Public-facing historical narratives often simplify debates for accessibility. While this increases reach, it can risk flattening historiographical disagreements. Some critics maintain that portions of the project occasionally privilege rhetorical force over archival qualification. Yet these criticisms should not obscure its enduring significance. Historical interventions need not achieve unanimous agreement to be important. Many influential historiographical works have generated debate precisely because they challenged established assumptions.

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The lasting significance of *The 1619 Project* lies in its ability to reopen foundational questions about national history, evidence, and memory. It has demonstrated that public history can shape academic discourse rather than merely translate it. Its contribution is therefore not limited to its claims about 1619; it lies equally in its demonstration that historical interpretation remains an active, contested, and publicly consequential enterprise.

**Empirical Review**

Pickup and Southall (2022) conducted a study on *Critical Discourse Analysis of the 1619 Project Controversy and Its Implications for Social Studies Educators*. The study was carried out in the United States with emphasis on social studies classrooms and educational institutions where the adoption of *The 1619 Project* generated academic and political debate. The researchers anchored their investigation on critical discourse theory, drawing significantly from Fairclough's discourse analytical framework to examine how competing narratives around race and historical memory are constructed and contested within educational settings. The study adopted a qualitative research design, specifically critical discourse analysis, which enabled the authors to interrogate texts, policy responses, and educational commentaries surrounding the project. Their sample consisted of policy documents, public educational statements, curriculum guides, and media-based academic commentaries purposively selected due to their direct engagement with the subject under review. Data were gathered through document analysis and textual interpretation. Findings revealed that *The 1619 Project* significantly influenced classroom discourse by prompting teachers and learners to reconsider dominant interpretations of American history. The authors observed that its integration into school curricula encouraged greater historical reflexivity among students, especially in interrogating the relationship between slavery and democratic development. They concluded that the project has pedagogical significance because it stimulates historical enquiry and strengthens analytical engagement with contested narratives, though it also exposes educational systems to ideological polarisation. This study is relevant because it provides empirical evidence on the educational impact of *The 1619 Project*. However, its concentration on pedagogical implications leaves insufficient attention to broader historiographical appraisal. The present paper addressed this omission by extending the analysis beyond classroom application to evaluate the project as a public history intervention and historical reinterpretive framework.

Welsh (2024) carried out a study entitled *The Hall-Colley Debate: A Stop on the Road to the 1619 Project*. The investigation focused on historical debates within American historiography, particularly examining the intellectual disagreements that preceded and shaped reactions to *The*

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*1619 Project*. The study was situated within the United States and employed revisionist historiographical theory as its guiding framework, particularly the tradition of reassessing foundational national narratives through historical reinterpretation. A historical-analytical design was adopted, enabling the author to review archival debates, historical publications, and intellectual exchanges related to slavery's place in American state formation. The sample comprised major historical texts, archival records, and contemporary academic responses selected through purposive sampling due to their direct relevance to the historical controversies under examination. Data collection relied on archival document analysis and interpretive historical comparison. The findings established that the debates surrounding *The 1619 Project* are part of a much longer historical disagreement over the centrality of slavery in explaining the origins of the United States. Welsh observed that the project did not introduce entirely new historical claims but revived unresolved interpretive disputes regarding slavery, capitalism, and democratic development. The study concluded that the significance of the project lies in its ability to make specialised historical arguments accessible to a broader public audience. This contribution is particularly important in understanding the project's role in reshaping public historical debate. The study offers practical insight into the continuity of historical disputes, yet it gives limited attention to the project's educational and social relevance in contemporary public consciousness. The current paper bridged this gap by examining both its historiographical implications and its practical significance in shaping historical awareness.

Chalikiopoulou and Veglis (2024) undertook a study on *Transfictionality, Extensions and Transmedia Journalism: Expanding the Storyworld of Slavery of The 1619 Project*. The research was conducted within the context of media studies in the United States and examined how digital storytelling platforms contributed to the reach and reception of *The 1619 Project*. The authors employed transmedia communication theory as the theoretical foundation, with particular emphasis on the dissemination of historical narratives across multiple platforms. A qualitative case study design was used to analyse the project's expansion from print publication into podcasts, educational resources, documentaries, and public engagement forums. Their sample consisted of selected project outputs, digital extensions, and audience engagement records identified purposively because of their direct relevance to understanding narrative transmission. Data were collected through content analysis and interpretive examination of media texts. Findings indicated that the project's use of multiple communication channels significantly enhanced public engagement with historical issues concerning slavery and racial inequality. The study established that this cross-platform strategy widened audience reach and strengthened historical reflection among readers, listeners, and educators. The authors concluded that *The 1619 Project* stands as an effective example of how historical narratives can be disseminated

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through digital media to influence public understanding. Their conclusion points to its methodological strength as a model for public historical communication. This study is especially useful because it demonstrates the project's practical relevance beyond traditional historical writing. Nevertheless, its focus on media transmission pays less attention to critical evaluation of the project's substantive historical claims and interpretive limitations. The present paper filled this gap by appraising both its communicative effectiveness and the historical arguments upon which its broader significance rests.

**Theoretical Review: Critical Race Theory**

The most suitable theoretical framework for this appraisal is Critical Race Theory (CRT), originally developed by legal scholars Derrick Bell, Kimberlé Crenshaw, Richard Delgado, and Mari Matsuda, with its formal emergence traced to Derrick Bell's foundational work in 1973 and its subsequent consolidation during the late 1980s through the contributions of Crenshaw and other critical legal theorists. Although initially rooted in legal studies, Critical Race Theory has evolved into a major analytical framework for examining historical structures, racial inequality, and institutional power. Its relevance to a paper appraising *The 1619 Project* lies in its emphasis on understanding race not as a biological fact but as a socially constructed mechanism embedded in legal, political, economic, and historical systems that reproduce inequality across generations (Delgado & Stefancic, 2023).

The theory rests on several central assumptions that make it highly applicable to the present study. It assumes that racism is not an occasional or abnormal feature of society but a normal and enduring characteristic embedded within institutional arrangements. This proposition challenges liberal assumptions that racial injustice is primarily the result of individual prejudice or isolated discriminatory actions. Instead, CRT contends that racial inequality is reproduced through laws, educational systems, economic structures, and historical narratives that privilege dominant groups while marginalising others. Another key assumption is the principle of historical permanence, which argues that present racial disparities cannot be adequately understood without examining the historical systems that produced them. This aligns directly with the central proposition of *The 1619 Project*, which traces current inequalities to slavery and its enduring institutional consequences. CRT also advances the concept of counter-storytelling, which insists that historical narratives should include the perspectives of historically excluded populations in order to challenge dominant interpretations of national history (Bell, 2020; Crenshaw et al., 2021).

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A major strength of Critical Race Theory is its explanatory power in connecting historical events to present institutional realities. It provides a robust framework for analysing how slavery, segregation, and racial exclusion continue to shape contemporary disparities in education, wealth distribution, healthcare, and political participation. This analytical depth makes it particularly useful for appraising historical works that seek to reinterpret foundational national narratives. Another significant strength lies in its capacity to foreground silenced historical voices. By privileging historically excluded perspectives, CRT enables more inclusive historical interpretation and offers a basis for reassessing accepted narratives that may obscure structural inequalities. The theory also encourages interdisciplinary analysis by drawing from law, history, sociology, political science, and education, thereby broadening its relevance for public history evaluation (Delgado & Stefancic, 2023).

Despite these strengths, Critical Race Theory is not without limitations. One major criticism is that its strong emphasis on structural racial oppression may sometimes understate the role of other intersecting historical factors such as class, gender, immigration, and geopolitical developments. Critics argue that this focus can lead to interpretive reductionism where racial explanations overshadow broader social dynamics. Another weakness concerns concerns over normative orientation. Some analysts contend that CRT occasionally prioritises political and moral critique over historical neutrality, which may expose its application to accusations of ideological bias. There is also the argument that some versions of the theory risk overgeneralising institutional continuity by assuming that racial structures persist in uniform ways across historical periods. These concerns require careful application of the framework to ensure analytical balance and historical precision (Cole, 2020).

Notwithstanding these limitations, Critical Race Theory offers the clearest and most compelling explanatory framework for this paper. Its application to *The 1619 Project* is particularly strong because both share a commitment to examining how historical systems of racial domination continue to influence present institutions. The project's central argument that slavery should be understood as foundational to American political and economic development resonates directly with CRT's assumption that historical racial structures shape present inequalities. Through the theoretical lens of CRT, the project can be appraised not simply as a historical publication but as an intervention that challenges dominant national narratives and exposes the embeddedness of racial hierarchy in institutional development.

The theory is especially relevant in evaluating the project's discussions of housing discrimination, healthcare inequality, incarceration, and wealth disparity. For instance, CRT

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provides the conceptual tools for interpreting how historical legal exclusions such as redlining and segregation evolved into measurable contemporary disparities in property ownership and economic mobility. It also offers explanatory grounding for the project's argument that Black resistance has been central to democratic reform in American history. By situating these claims within broader structures of institutional power, the theory strengthens the analytical foundation of the appraisal.

For the purpose of this paper, Critical Race Theory is adopted because it provides the most coherent basis for evaluating *The 1619 Project's* historical claims, practical relevance, and contribution to public historical discourse. Its emphasis on structural continuity, historical accountability, and counter-narrative analysis makes it particularly appropriate for assessing a work that seeks to reposition slavery at the centre of American historical understanding.

## 6. DISCUSSIONS

This appraisal paper affirms that *The 1619 Project* has made a substantial contribution to the reinterpretation of American historical foundations by compelling renewed engagement with the place of slavery in the making of the United States. The findings reveal broad convergence among the authors reviewed regarding the project's success in disrupting traditional historical narratives that privilege 1776 as the uncontested point of national origin. Hannah-Jones (2021) presents the argument that slavery constituted a foundational institutional force in shaping American democracy, political culture, and economic expansion. This position is reinforced by Baptist's (2020) historical account of slavery's role in the development of American capitalism and by Darity and Mullen's (2020) analysis of persistent racial wealth disparities rooted in historical exclusion. While Wilentz (2021) and Oakes (2021) challenge aspects of the project's causal interpretation, particularly its treatment of slavery as a central motivation for the American Revolution, their critiques do not diminish the broader interpretive value of the project. Rather, they indicate that the project has succeeded in provoking rigorous historical re-examination. This is one of its strongest implications. Historical interventions achieve significance not merely through consensus but through their capacity to stimulate sustained critical enquiry. The practical implication is evident in how historical debate generated by the project has encouraged wider public interrogation of constitutional development, democratic ideals, and the historical foundations of racial inequality.

The appraisal further demonstrate that the educational and practical relevance of *The 1619 Project* remains one of its most compelling strengths. Pickup and Southall (2022) establish that its integration into classroom discourse has promoted stronger historical reasoning among

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learners by encouraging direct engagement with contested evidence and interpretation. This finding aligns with the observations of Welsh (2024), who notes that the project broadened public historical engagement by making specialist debates accessible to wider audiences. Practical illustrations support this position. The use of the project in secondary and tertiary educational settings has encouraged discussions linking historical slavery to present-day issues such as maternal mortality disparities, housing segregation, and mass incarceration. For instance, contemporary discussions of racial inequality in healthcare often draw from historical patterns of exclusion and exploitation examined in the project, thereby enabling students and researchers to connect historical analysis with present institutional realities. Such application underscores the project's pedagogical significance. Although some critics suggest that its incorporation into educational settings risks ideological contestation, this paper finds that such debate is itself educationally productive because it strengthens analytical engagement with historical evidence. The project therefore serves as an effective instrument for fostering historical consciousness and encouraging reflective engagement with the social consequences of historical systems.

The appraisal of the project's strengths and limitations revealed that its significance as a public history intervention rests largely on its capacity to merge accessibility with historical argumentation. Chalikiopoulou and Veglis (2024) rightly observe that its transmedia format significantly expanded public reach, enabling historical issues traditionally confined to academic circles to enter public discourse through print, podcasts, documentaries, and curricular resources. This communicative strength distinguishes the project from conventional historical publications. At the same time, the criticisms advanced by Wright (2020), particularly regarding the risks of historical compression and singular framing, raise legitimate concerns about interpretive scope. These critiques are important because they call attention to the need for balance in public historical storytelling. Yet the findings of this paper suggest that these limitations should be viewed in proportion to the project's broader achievements. By centring Black historical experience and exposing continuities between slavery and present institutional inequalities, the project has widened the field of public historical discussion. A practical example is the way public policy conversations concerning reparative justice, voting rights, and educational curriculum reform increasingly draw upon historical arguments popularised by the project. This indicates that its influence extends beyond interpretation into civic and institutional reflection.

The adoption of Critical Race Theory provides strong theoretical support for these appraisal. The theory's central assumption that racism is structurally embedded within institutions offers a clear explanatory basis for understanding the project's emphasis on slavery as foundational to American development. Delgado and Stefancic (2023) argue that present racial inequalities are

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best understood through historical continuity rather than isolated contemporary events. This perspective directly supports the project's linkage of slavery to ongoing disparities in wealth accumulation, legal exclusion, and healthcare outcomes.

The theory also strengthens the paper's appraisal of the project's educational relevance through its emphasis on counter-storytelling. By centring historical experiences long marginalised within dominant narratives, *The 1619 Project* performs the precise function that Critical Race Theory identifies as necessary for exposing institutionalised exclusions. Practical illustrations of this alignment are evident in the project's treatment of redlining, Black political resistance, and educational inequality, all of which demonstrate how historical structures continue to shape measurable present conditions.

The theoretical framework therefore validates this paper by showing that the project's reinterpretation of history is grounded in a defensible analytical tradition concerned with historical accountability and institutional critique. This strengthens the conclusion that *The 1619 Project* stands as an important public historical intervention whose principal implication lies in its ability to reshape historical understanding while advancing informed public reflection on race, memory, and national identity.

## 7. CONCLUSIONS

This appraisal concluded that *The 1619 Project* stands as a significant public history intervention that has substantially reshaped contemporary engagement with American historical foundations by repositioning slavery from the margins to the centre of national historical interpretation. The appraisal has shown that its central historical arguments have made an important contribution to rethinking established narratives surrounding the origins of the United States, particularly by drawing sustained attention to the structural role of slavery in shaping political institutions, economic systems, and democratic development. While some of its specific historical claims remain subject to legitimate academic contestation, the project's broader value lies in its success in stimulating rigorous intellectual debate, encouraging historical reassessment, and broadening public access to critical historical enquiry.

Its educational and practical relevance is particularly evident in its capacity to deepen historical consciousness, enrich pedagogical engagement, and connect past systems of racial subjugation to measurable present inequalities in areas such as healthcare, housing, education, and criminal justice. The empirical evidence reviewed further confirms that the project has influenced academic discourse, curriculum reform, and public historical reflection in ways that extend

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beyond conventional historical publication. Through the analytical support of Critical Race Theory, the paper affirm that *The 1619 Project* provides a defensible and impactful framework for understanding historical continuity and institutional inequality. Its enduring significance lies not in the finality of its interpretations, but in its capacity to provoke informed reflection, critical historical engagement, and renewed interrogation of how national memory is constructed and sustained.

**8. RECOMMENDATIONS**

In view of the above appraisal, the following recommendations were suggested:

1. Educational institutions should integrate carefully moderated historical inquiry modules based on *The 1619 Project* alongside competing historical interpretations in order to strengthen critical reasoning, evidence-based analysis, and balanced historical engagement among learners. This approach would allow students to interrogate historical claims comparatively rather than encounter singular interpretations in isolation.
2. Researchers and historians should undertake further empirical and archival investigations into the specific historical claims advanced by *The 1619 Project*, particularly those relating to the American Revolution, economic development, and democratic reform, in order to refine historical understanding and strengthen the evidentiary foundations of ongoing debates.
3. Policy and public history institutions should utilise the historical insights generated by *The 1619 Project* to inform practical interventions addressing structural inequality, particularly in education, public memorialisation, housing policy, and racial justice programming, so that historical reflection translates into measurable institutional and social reform.

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