
Excerpts of Student-Written Essays from The 1857 Project

The following excerpts are from essays by students from **Kirkwood and University City high schools in St. Louis, MO**. The essays were published as part of The 1857 Project, a special issue of the Gateway Journal Review that chronicles the history of racial injustice in St. Louis, Missouri and Illinois. Click here to read the full essays. (pages 64-77)

These excerpts are referenced in extension activities [link] that students can explore to support their analysis of The 1857 Project.

Excerpt for the activity “Create a Photo Essay that Explores Contradictions in Your Own Community.”

1. *“Missouri: The Show-Me State. One of these days it’s bound to start living up to its nickname, right? All I want is for someone to show me. Show me that we’re done taking what’s not ours from minorities. Show me that we’re not robbing marginalized cultures of their customs and practices, rarely acknowledging any historical context or the years and years of oppression they endured. Show me that good ole suburban St. Louis can rise above such blunt injustice. Go on, I’m waiting.” - from “Can Missouri show political correctness, equality?” by Malcia Greene, Gateway Journalism Review*

Excerpts for the activity “Conduct a Research Project that Explores Redlining in your Community”

1. *In his report, “The Making of Ferguson,” Richard Rothstein, historian and author of “The Color of Law,” said that events reflecting this racial tension, such as the shooting of Michael Brown, are largely a result of years of housing policies such as zoning and redlining, the refusal of mortgages and insurance based on race, and its effects on those areas. Dr. Jason Purnell, associate professor at Washington University, said these problems in residential segregation have been an issue in St. Louis for quite a while, and have been shown through old state and federal acts that still have a role in the opportunity given to certain areas. “[St. Louis] had a longer period for racism to [develop], and it was aided and abetted by the government, and local agencies like banks and insurance companies that helped to perpetuate it,” Purnell said. “[The percentage of poverty] creates a vicious cycle of disinvestment and disability for people to access [opportunities.]” According to a 2014 study by For the Sake of All, a report on the health of African Americans in St. Louis, there was a 18-year difference in life expectancy depending on which side of the city you lived in St. Louis. Purnell said this isn’t due to the individual’s efforts, but the situation of life they’ve been put in.” -from “Redlining’s long lasting mark” by Rachel Finan, Gateway Journalism Review*

2. *"Before 1948, realtors reserved the northside of St. Louis for people of color. Laws blocked off a section of the city to contain the growing population of foreigners and black Americans in one place—away from white people. The segregation and isolation of blacks resulted from racially restrictive covenants at first and then redlining. Both practices are now outlawed. Anyone driving down Delmar Blvd. can see the split caused by the former redlined road. North Side Community School sits north of Delmar, in the area once redlined for people of color and now housing a predominantly black population. After a decade of growth, the school reigns as the number one charter and open-enrollment school in the St. Louis region, the second best charter school in Missouri, and is within the top 10% of charter schools across America." - from "Northside Knights" by Emma Lingo, Gateway Journalism Review*

Excerpts for the activity, "Analyze and Write: Reflecting on the American Dream"

1. *"Due to the false notion of the "American Dream," it has been promoted that the reason for poverty and wealth disparity is laziness. If poor white people can work their way up, why can't poor black people? Black people must be lazy. In reality, if you're born black, the odds are stacked against you, but if you're black and poor, the opportunities are scarce. It all starts at the root — 1619. Yes, I know that's a long time ago. But the repercussions of slavery have devastated the black community because there's never been a proper apology that comes in the form of a check. The economy is the key to controlling and suppressing a group of people; it's just another form of slavery. Kids like me have won the lottery. According to the St. Louis Post-Dispatch, a report done by EdBuild shows that nationwide there's a \$23 billion racial funding gap with K-12 schools. EdBuild is a national group dedicated to promoting fairer funding of public schools for low-income students. In Missouri, "predominantly nonwhite school districts in Missouri have 2% less funding on average than predominantly white school districts." Although 2% doesn't sound like a large amount, that's about \$134 less per student, the report says. The biggest contribution to the gap is disparities in property taxes. Nation-wide, nonwhite districts took around \$54 billion (\$4,500 per student) in 2016 in local tax dollars while white districts took in more than \$77 billion (\$7,000 per student). None of this is by coincidence. It is systematic oppression. - from "There's never been a proper apology for slavery" by Kiden-Aloyse Smith, Gateway Journalism Review*
2. *"A New York Times investigative journalist and founder of the 1619 Project, Nikole Hannah-Jones re-examines and challenges our democracy's founding ideals. Jones' 1619 Project reframes America's history by recounting events of slavery and the contribution of Black Americans in founding America. Throughout her essay, she discusses and evaluates our founding ideals and recognizes the important role of Black Americans in the establishment of our nation. Nikole Hannah-Jones effectively challenges the "founding ideals" of America and in the process unfolds the many roles black Americans had in its establishment. Without the perseverance of black Americans throughout history and now, the American Dream would not hold any meaning. Hannah-Jones claimed that this country was "founded on both an ideal and a lie." Indeed America was built on ideals that can be considered lies. For instance, the Declaration of Independence which states, "... that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness ..." The same men who sat and drafted these exact words*

couldn't fulfill their promise — the hypocrisy. What happened to "Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness"? Clearly, these rights were not extended to African Americans or they wouldn't continuously fight against the violence and oppression towards them. - from "Re-examination of the American Dream" by Sahra Jamal, Gateway Journalism Review

3. *"The American Dream is an ideal that the country embodies. Humanity buys into it because it gives us a sense of hope. But it leaves us disappointed. In reality, the dream is not accessible to all people, especially African Americans who helped create it. American freedom is the foundation of the American dream because it's based on the idea of individuality and paving a road to accomplish your dream. The military has always been a symbol of American freedom because we are protecting what other countries envy and want to dismantle. Hannah-Jones comments that her father believed his country would treat him well if he served in the military, but was passed over for opportunities and was discharged. She says "Like all the black men and women in my family, he believed in hard work, but like all the black men and women in my family, no matter how hard he worked, he never got ahead." This was the sad reality for all African Americans who would enlist in the military in that time period. From the Revolutionary War to Vietnam, African Americans would return after their service and wouldn't be given their medals or the same benefits other veterans received. According to History.com, the GI bill excluded over 1.2 million African Americans who served in World War II. This shows how the American dream didn't apply to all people because even though African Americans fought for America overseas, they weren't given the same freedoms they fought for. African Americans have always been a prime example of hypocrisy in America in terms of freedom. While the Founding Fathers were writing our constitution, slaves were building their houses. While Thomas Jefferson established America as the land of the free, enslaved African Americans were constructing the White House. African Americans were the first to stand up for their freedoms and were responsible for making America the true "land of the free."* - from "The American Dream is based on a whitewashed version of history" by Zoe Yudovich, Gateway Journalism Review