

The 1619 Project and a Path Forward to Racial Justice

Proskauer For Good Blog on July 1, 2021

In commemoration of [Juneteenth 2021](#), Proskauer was honored to host [Nikole Hannah-Jones](#), founder of [The 1619 Project](#), as part of its *A Path Forward* lecture series and [Collaborate for Change](#) program. The discussion was moderated by [Keisha-Ann Gray](#), a partner in the New York office, with support from Proskauer's Black Lawyer Affinity Group.

Hannah-Jones shared insight into the enduring legacy of slavery and how systemic racial inequities contrast with American ideals. Although this holiday celebrates a moment of hope and joy, its existence also raises important questions and invites reflection.

The 1619 Project, an initiative at *The New York Times* spearheaded by Hannah-Jones, is provocative for some because it challenges the concept of our national identity. Hannah-Jones questions the framing of the nation's founders as ushering in liberty and equality for all when some Americans were considered to be less than human. No longer should we view slavery and the contributions of Black Americans as a footnote, but rather "[at the very center of the United States.](#)"

The 1619 Project draws attention to an entire portion of U.S. history that for too long has not only gone untold, but has been erased from the country's collective memory. According to the [Equal Justice Initiative](#), there were more than 4,400 racial terror lynchings in the United States during the period between Reconstruction and World War II. This racial violence was part of a broad program of disenfranchisement and segregation that created for Black people enormous barriers in access to justice and the ability to exercise fundamental rights and live as equals under the law. America's true identity as a nation is thus rooted in struggle. Although Americans may hold certain truths to be "self-evident," that has not made those truths a reality for everyone. As long as this struggle is missing from textbooks, classrooms, and dining room tables, we will never truly understand American history. In a free society, we should never allow our national identity to be based on a sanitized version of the past.

Without acknowledging and understanding the origins of the inequities that exist today, it is impossible to address them. The legacy of slavery is evident in the racial disparities pervading many aspects of our society, including education, health care, employment, housing, and in our criminal justice and electoral systems. The understanding of how racism has shaped and continues to shape our country is critically important not only in fashioning effective solutions but in developing a sense of urgency in addressing inequality.

Proskauer has pledged to [raise its collective consciousness and work with racial justice and community organizations toward meaningful change](#). From increasing pro bono work on racial justice issues, to establishing a fellowship with the [NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund](#), and serving as a leading law firm in the [Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law's Election Protection initiative](#), Proskauer recognizes the vital role that the private sector must play in realizing the American ideals we hold so dear.

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