



Harvard & the Legacy of Slavery

Film Discussion Facilitation Guide

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INTRODUCTION

Harvard & the Legacy of Slavery is a powerful film that delves into Harvard's connection to the institution of slavery. Watching and discussing this film in a group can be an important learning experience and opportunity for building community and making change. The following facilitation guide is meant to help students, alumni, staff and faculty members, and other University affiliates navigate this conversation and the challenges that can arise when addressing difficult themes. While this video focuses specifically on Harvard's connections to the institution of slavery, we encourage you to adjust the content of the questions to your institution or context.

Who should use this guide? Students, faculty and staff members, and/or alumni

How much time is required? 65–85 minutes (Pre-Discussion Community Norm Setting, 5–10 minutes; Film Viewing, 25 minutes; Post-Film Group Discussion, 30–45 minutes)

What materials do you need? In addition to having a way to show the film to all participants, we suggest (if you are meeting in person) that you provide paper and pens for participants to jot down their thoughts during the reflection activities and while viewing the film.

AGENDA

Welcome (2 minutes)

At the beginning of the session, if this is a new group or one where participants do not know one another, thank people for choosing to participate in a challenging and thought-provoking conversation and warn participants that the film does include graphic images that may be emotionally difficult to engage with. If you are leading this conversation with members of the Harvard campus community, please also advise participants that [additional supports are available from the Office for Equity, Diversity, Inclusion & Belonging](#).

If one person is facilitating, review the agenda quickly, explaining that in addition to watching the film, there will be time for individual reflection, small group sharing, and whole group conversation. If you are collectively self-facilitating, review the agenda together and make sure you understand and agree on the process.

Pre-Discussion Community Norm Setting (5–10 minutes)

We recommend taking time to set discussion norms in light of the difficult themes the film raises. Norm building can help facilitate conversations by directly addressing community expectations and guidelines for engaging in challenging discussions and handling potential disagreement or conflict. We suggest that you propose the following norms to the group:

- **Respect for Self and Others**
(e.g., Actively listen, maintain confidentiality, and challenge ideas not people)
- **Acknowledge the Different Backgrounds and Experiences of Others**
(e.g., Consider the role of your identities and power dynamics)
- **Accept Challenge and Anticipate Discomfort**
(e.g., Push your thinking, hold yourself and others accountable, and contribute to the conversation)
- **Keep an Open Mind**
(e.g., Allow for growth, listen before responding, and stay engaged)
- **Embrace Uncertainty and Non-Closure**

After offering the above norms, we suggest you ask participants for their input for any additional items. For additional resources on facilitation, see “[Leveraging Norms for Challenging Conversations](#)” (2016).

Film Viewing (25 minutes)

While viewing the film, have participants consider the following questions:

- *What are the different ways in which Harvard was complicit in and benefited from the institution of slavery?*
- *How do Harvard’s physical spaces, architecture, and landscape represent or obscure its connections to slavery?*
- *What dilemmas or themes arise for you as you learn about Harvard’s connections to slavery?*

Post-Film Group Discussion (30–45 minutes)

INDIVIDUAL REFLECTION AND SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION (10–15 MINUTES)

We suggest beginning the discussion with an acknowledgment that this film presents difficult content and that engaging in this conversation may be challenging, followed by a few minutes for individual reflection. Providing time for participants to think quietly, sit with the information they’ve just taken in, and gather their thoughts is important before launching into the discussion. This combined with conversation in pairs or small groups is useful because participants are often reluctant to share their thoughts in a large group right away. To create small groups, you may ask participants to simply turn to those around them. For groups in which the individuals know each other, we recommend creating small groups by counting participants off such that they are grouped with someone they do not know well.

Because different people may prefer to enter the conversation in different ways, we recommend posing the following questions for individual reflection, followed by small group (pairs or trios) discussion. Suggest that each person reflect individually on one of the first two questions and share their response with their group, and then that the group move into discussing the third question together:

- *Was this history something you were aware of? What shocked or surprised you? Why?*
- *What do you do when you discover that an institution has odious elements in its past?*
- *What is your responsibility as an individual, or our responsibility as a group, to wrestle with this history?*

FULL GROUP DISCUSSION (20–30 MINUTES)

As a full group you may choose to continue focusing on the questions above, or to expand the conversation further by raising one or more of the following questions:

- *What are the ways in which these connections to the institution of slavery have lasting implications at Harvard and beyond?*
- *What should we do as a result of what we have learned?*
- *What should we expect of Harvard moving forward?*

Closing (3 minutes)

Thank everyone for participating and agree on next steps, if any. ■