

“I don’t believe this stuff about ‘intrinsic differences’ between people”

Workers respond to New York Times’ 1619 Project’s claim of an unbridgeable racial divide in US

Our reporters
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The 1619 Project, launched by the *New York Times* in August on the 400th Anniversary of the arrival of the first slaves in Virginia, is a reactionary attempt to rewrite the history of the United States on the basis of the supposed centrality of race and racial conflict. The *World Socialist Web Site* has refuted in detail the historical falsifications advanced by the *Times* and supplemented its assessment with extensive interviews with leading US historians.

Under conditions of growing class conflict, with strikes and social upheavals spreading across the US and around the world and with interest in socialism growing, the 1619 Project is being used by sections of the ruling class to divert social anger and drive a wedge between workers. According to Nikole Hannah-Jones, the lead author in the *Times* project, “Anti-black racism runs in the very DNA of this country.”

In general, the workers with whom the WSWS spoke reported never reading the *New York Times* and were therefore not aware of the 1619 Project. Though the paper is a Bible for the affluent upper-middle class, it has a near-zero circulation among workers. However, the WSWS found a broad striving among workers for unity across all races, cutting across the *Times*’ campaign.

A WSWS reporting team asked a Fiat Chrysler worker employed at the Jefferson North Assembly Plant in Detroit, “Do you think that race is in the DNA of society?”

He replied, “I think it is taught. People are born naturally wanting unity. They then see how other people talk about a certain class of people ... it’s not right...”

When asked if he thought racism was in the “DNA” of the United States he remarked, “It does exist, we shouldn’t be naïve. But, in my plant, I haven’t seen divisions. Everyone is actually solid together as one trying to get a good contract regardless of whatever race, gender or nationality.”

The WSWS asked a Ford worker if she thought there was an unbridgeable racial divide in America. She answered, “I don’t

believe in that at all. At the end of the day I believe we are all people, we all eat, we all bleed the same. I love everybody. It is not about color. It is not about black, it is not about white. Anyone who tries to put a label on race, it’s bad.”

A temporary worker at Fiat Chrysler Sterling Heights Assembly north of Detroit, who is white, spoke to the WSWS as she was leaving the pizzeria with a co-worker who is African-American. “We’re all in this together. They try to make it a black-white thing, but it isn’t. They don’t want us united. It’s the union too; they push racism and get all their relatives hired. The first paycheck I got after being hired in, the union took out \$90. If you’re a temporary part-time worker, they follow you and want you to work like a robot.”

A Ford Chicago Assembly Plant worker said he was surprised and disturbed that the *New York Times* was attempting to deny the progressive historical role of Abraham Lincoln. “I think we were lucky to have had a President like Abraham Lincoln because he signed the Emancipation Proclamation, which freed the slaves. There are a lot of things I’ve heard about Lincoln that were negative, but they never gave their sources on it.

“What I think is that it has become so easy for the powers-that-be to cover up the truth about history. They can cut-and-paste information out of screen shots and do other things to manipulate information that we read.

“That’s why we need to look for the truth ourselves and study history ourselves and find out for ourselves what the truth really is. We need to know what the source of the information is that we’re getting.”

The WSWS also had a conversation with a veteran GM worker at the Flint Assembly plant. Asked about the efforts to divide workers along racial lines, he said, “I grew up in a very diverse neighborhood in Bay City, Michigan. There were blacks, Polish and German guys, and Hispanics. We always hung out and played basketball together. As we got into our 50s and 60s, we would come back home and we respected each

other.

“I don’t believe this stuff about ‘intrinsic differences’ between people. We can all be one. The only experience I ever had with racism was when I was 26 years old and I went to Rockford, Illinois for a job. There was a bar next to the shop where I worked and I went in there with two co-workers, one black, one Mexican.

“When we got there some guy stood up in the bar and said, ‘We don’t want blacks and Spics here.’ I ignored him and he said it again. Now I had done a lot of wrestling in school and I figured I was in for a fight. My knees were shaking a little, but I was ready for it. Then the bar owner said, ‘Hey, you got to get out of here now.’ I said, ‘I’ve haven’t had my beer yet.’ He said, ‘No, I’m not talking to you.’ He told the bigot to get out of the bar. After that several of the white guys in the back of the bar came up to me and said, ‘We like the way you stood up to that idiot. You’re going to work with us in the plant.’

“We are all just trying to live.”

Referring to the US Civil War, he added, “Lincoln was just trying to change things. He freed the slaves and gave them land. He saw slavery as holding down people and gave them freedom.”

Rebecca, an educator from Colorado, said, “The United States is not plagued by some kind of inherent racism, nor is racism the framework through which our entire history can be analyzed. People of races and ethnicities from around the world work side-by-side every day in American schools to try and improve their lives and grow into contributors to society without regard to race. Yet students are being led by the 1619 Project and its new curriculum to believe that white racism is defining and destroying society? That all school subjects need to be understood through a racial and ethnic lens? That we must now judge everyone based on their race? That racism is at the core of the country’s entire history and culture? This assertion is false, insulting and dangerous.

“The financial crisis of the last ten years has plunged the majority of the world into crisis, a fact that has not gone unnoticed by today’s students. Instead of dreaming, they are being buried under a lifetime of student debt, skyrocketing costs of living, crumbling infrastructure, a shortage of good jobs, and crippling financial struggle at home. They’ve also seen that their teachers are in the same boat that they are and have admirably taken to the streets this year in protest over their appalling pay and working conditions. And thanks to the internet, young people have never been more informed and engaged: they know how school systems work, they know where all the money is, they know where it goes, and they know where it does not go. They are outraged, disgusted, and frightened for their futures, and they are demanding change.

“The Democratic Party and the *New York Times* are terrified of this and will continue defending the ruling elite’s interests just as they have done throughout the economic crisis. The real purpose of the 1619 Project is to pacify rebellious schools by

blanketing the minds of young people with a different subject altogether, to divide people up along racial lines, and to channel revolutionary energy away from the overthrow of capitalism and into the safe haven of identity politics.”

Rich, a US postal worker in Maine, said, “The 1619 Project is being published under the semblance of confronting the historical basis of inequality in the United States of America. However, this is not an educational campaign, but rather one of misinformation, falsely assigning the race issue as the basis to all the ills of capitalism. This is intended to confuse working people, distracting from the very real socioeconomic causes for their plight, the true driving force of inequality, which is class exploitation.”

Alan, a retail worker in Little Rock, Arkansas, said, “The 1619 Project is being dispensed, free of charge, to schools and other places for thousands of children, students and adults to ingest this historically revisionist and racist nonsense. The primary historical distortion is positioning race above class. The *Communist Manifesto*, written by revolutionaries Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels in 1847, states:

The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles.

Freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, guild-master and journeyman, in a word, oppressor and oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another, carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight, a fight that each time ended, either in a revolutionary reconstitution of society at large, or in the common ruin of the contending classes.

“Reality is intruding upon this racist falsification of American and world history. The aim of Nikole Hannah-Jones, the *New York Times* and the Democratic Party is to pit workers against each other and direct their attention away from social and economic inequality based on class to the racist narrative that whites are supposedly predisposed to be racist.”

Alan concluded: “The fight for historical accuracy and truth is critical for the unity of the working class.”



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