

Introduction to *The New York Times' 1619 Project and the Racist Falsification of History*

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Published below is the introduction by World Socialist Web Site International Editorial Board Chairman David North to the forthcoming book, *The New York Times' 1619 Project and the Racist Falsification of History*. It is available for pre-order at Mehring Books for delivery in late January 2021.

The volume is a comprehensive refutation of the New York Times' 1619 Project, a racist falsification of the history of the American Revolution and Civil War. In addition to historical essays, it includes interviews from eminent historians of the United States, including James McPherson, James Oakes, Gordon Wood, Richard Carwardine, Victoria Bynum, and Clayborne Carson.

I should respectfully suggest that although the oppressed may need history for identity and inspiration, they need it above all for the truth of what the world has made of them and of what they have helped make of the world. This knowledge alone can produce that sense of identity which ought to be sufficient for inspiration; and those who look to history to provide glorious moments and heroes invariably are betrayed into making catastrophic errors of political judgment.—Eugene Genovese [1]

Both ideological and historical myths are a product of immediate class interests. ... These myths may be refuted by restoring historical truth—the honest presentation of actual facts and tendencies of the past.—Vadim Z. Rogovin [2]

On August 14, 2019, the *New York Times* unveiled the 1619 Project. Timed to coincide with the four hundredth anniversary of the arrival of the first slaves in colonial Virginia, the 100-page special edition of the *New York Times Magazine* consisted of a series of essays that present American history as an unyielding racial struggle, in which black Americans have waged a solitary fight to redeem democracy against white racism.

The *Times* mobilized vast editorial and financial resources behind the 1619 Project. With backing from the corporate-endowed Pulitzer Center for Crisis Reporting, hundreds of thousands of copies were sent to schools. The 1619 Project fanned out to other media formats. Plans were even announced for films and television programming, backed by billionaire media personality Oprah Winfrey.

As a business venture the 1619 Project clambers on, but as an effort at historical revision it has been, to a great extent, discredited. This outcome is owed in large measure to the intervention of the *World Socialist Web Site*, with the support of a number of distinguished and courageous historians, which exposed the 1619 Project for what it is: a combination of shoddy journalism, careless and dishonest research, and a false, politically-motivated narrative that makes racism and racial conflict the central driving forces of American history.

In support of its claim that American history can be understood only

when viewed through the prism of racial conflict, the 1619 Project sought to discredit American history's two foundational events: The Revolution of 1775–83, and the Civil War of 1861–65. This could only be achieved by a series of distortions, omissions, half-truths, and false statements—deceptions that are catalogued and refuted in this book.

The *New York Times* is no stranger to scandals produced by dishonest and unprincipled journalism. Its long and checkered history includes such episodes as its endorsement of the Moscow frame-up trials of 1936–38 by its Pulitzer Prize-winning correspondent, Walter Duranty, and, during World War II, its unconscionable decision to treat the murder of millions of European Jews as “a relatively unimportant story” that did not require extensive and systematic coverage. [3] More recently, the *Times* was implicated, through the reporting of Judith Miller and the columns of Thomas Friedman, in the peddling of government misinformation about “weapons of mass destruction” that served to legitimize the 2003 invasion of Iraq. Many other examples of flagrant violations of even the generally lax standards of journalistic ethics could be cited, especially during the past decade, as the *New York Times*—listed on the New York Stock Exchange with a market capitalization of \$7.5 billion—acquired increasingly the character of a media empire.

The “financialization” of the *Times* has proceeded alongside another critical determinant of the newspaper's selection of issues to be publicized and promoted: that is, its central role in the formulation and aggressive marketing of the policies of the Democratic Party. This process has served to obliterate the always tenuous boundary lines between objective reporting and sheer propaganda. The consequences of the *Times' financial and political evolution have found a particularly reactionary expression in the 1619 Project. Led by Ms. Nikole Hannah-Jones and New York Times Magazine editor Jake Silverstein, the 1619 Project was developed for the purpose of providing the Democratic Party with a historical narrative that legitimized its efforts to develop an electoral constituency based on the promotion of racial politics. Assisting the Democratic Party's decades-long efforts to disassociate itself from its identification with the social welfare liberalism of the New Deal to Great Society era, the 1619 Project, by prioritizing racial conflict, marginalizes, and even eliminates, class conflict as a notable factor in history and politics.*

The shift from class struggle to racial conflict did not develop within a vacuum. The *New York Times*, as we shall explain, is drawing upon and exploiting reactionary intellectual tendencies that have been fermenting within substantial sections of middle-class academia for several decades.

The political interests and related ideological considerations that motivated the 1619 Project determined the unprincipled and dishonest methods employed by the *Times* in its creation. The *New York Times* was well aware of the fact that it was promoting a race-based narrative of

American history that could not withstand critical evaluation by leading scholars of the Revolution and Civil War. The *New York Times Magazine*'s editor deliberately rejected consultation with the most respected and authoritative historians.

Moreover, when one of the *Times*' fact-checkers identified false statements that were utilized to support the central arguments of the 1619 Project, her findings were ignored. And as the false claims and factual errors were exposed, the *Times* surreptitiously edited key phrases in 1619 Project material posted online. The knowledge and expertise of historians of the stature of Gordon Wood and James McPherson were of no use to the *Times*. Its editors knew they would object to the central thesis of the 1619 Project, promoted by lead essayist Hannah-Jones: that the American Revolution was launched as a conspiracy to defend slavery against pending British emancipation.

Ms. Hannah-Jones had asserted:

Conveniently left out of our founding mythology is the fact that one of the primary reasons the colonists decided to declare their independence from Britain was because they wanted to protect the institution of slavery. By 1776, Britain had grown deeply conflicted over its role in the barbaric institution that had reshaped the Western Hemisphere. In London, there were growing calls to abolish the slave trade ... [S]ome might argue that this nation was founded not as a democracy but as a slavocracy. [4]

This claim—that the American Revolution was not a revolution at all, but a counterrevolution waged to defend slavery—is freighted with enormous implications for American and world history. The denunciation of the American Revolution legitimizes the rejection of all historical narratives that attribute any progressive content to the overthrow of British rule over the colonies and, therefore, to the wave of democratic revolutions that it inspired throughout the world. If the establishment of the United States was a counterrevolution, the founding document of this event—the Declaration of Independence, which proclaimed the equality of man—merits only contempt as an exemplar of the basest hypocrisy.

How, then, can one explain the explosive global impact of the American Revolution upon the thought and politics of its immediate contemporaries and of the generations that followed?

The philosopher Diderot—among the greatest of all Enlightenment thinkers—responded ecstatically to the American Revolution:

After centuries of general oppression, may the revolution which has just occurred across the seas, by offering all the inhabitants of Europe an asylum against fanaticism and tyranny, instruct those who govern men on the legitimate use of their authority! May these brave Americans, who would rather see their wives raped, their children murdered, their dwellings destroyed, their fields ravaged, their villages burned, and rather shed their blood and die than lose the slightest portion of their freedom, prevent the enormous accumulation and unequal distribution of wealth, luxury, effeminacy, and corruption of manners, and may they provide for the maintenance of their freedom and the survival of their government! [5]

Voltaire, in February 1778, only months before his death, arranged a public meeting with Benjamin Franklin, the much-celebrated envoy of the American Revolution. The aged *philosophe* related in a letter that his embrace of Franklin was witnessed by twenty spectators who were moved

to “tender tears.” [6]

Marx was correct when he wrote, in his 1867 preface to the first edition of *Das Kapital* that “the American war of independence sounded the tocsin for the European middle class,” inspiring the uprisings that were to sweep away the feudal rubbish, accumulated over centuries, of the *Ancien Régime*. [7]

As the historian Peter Gay noted in his celebrated study of Enlightenment culture and politics, “The liberty that the Americans had won and were guarding was not merely an exhilarating performance that delighted European spectators and gave them grounds for optimism about man; it was also proving a realistic ideal worthy of imitation.” [8]

R.R. Palmer, among the most erudite of mid-twentieth century historians, defined the American Revolution as a critical moment in the evolution of Western Civilization, the beginning of a forty-year era of democratic revolutions. Palmer wrote:

[T]he American and the French Revolutions, the two chief actual revolutions of the period, with all due allowance for the great differences between them, nevertheless shared a great deal in common, and that what they shared was shared also at the same time by various people and movements in other countries, notably in England, Ireland, Holland, Belgium, Switzerland, and Italy, but also in Germany, Hungary, and Poland, and by scattered individuals in places like Spain and Russia. [9]

More recently, Jonathan Israel, the historian of *Radical Enlightenment*, argues that the American Revolution

formed part of a wider transatlantic revolutionary sequence, a series of revolutions in France, Italy, Holland, Switzerland, Germany, Ireland, Haiti, Poland, Spain, Greece, and Spanish America. ... The endeavors of the Founding Fathers and their followings abroad prove the deep interaction of the American Revolution and its principles with the other revolutions, substantiating the Revolution's global role less as a directly intervening force than inspirational motor, the primary model, for universal change. [10]

Marxists have never viewed either the American or French Revolutions through rose-tinted glasses. In examining world historical events, Friedrich Engels rejected simplistic pragmatic interpretations that explain and judge “everything according to the motives of the action,” which divides “men in their historical activity into noble and ignoble and then finds that as a rule the noble are defrauded and the ignoble are victorious.” Personal motives, Engels insisted, are only of a “secondary significance.” The critical questions that historians must ask are: “What driving forces in turn stand behind these motives? What are the historical causes which transform themselves into these motives in the brains of the actors?” [11]

Whatever the personal motives and individual limitations of those who led the struggle for independence, the revolution waged by the American colonies against the British Crown was rooted in objective socioeconomic processes associated with the rise of capitalism as a world system. Slavery had existed for several thousand years, but the specific form that it assumed between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries was bound up with the development and expansion of capitalism. As Marx explained:

The discovery of gold and silver in America, the extirpation,

enslavement and entombment in mines of the aboriginal population, the beginning of the conquest and looting of the East Indies, the turning of Africa into a warren for the commercial hunting of black-skins, signalled the rosy dawn of the era of capitalist production. These idyllic proceedings are the chief momenta of the era of capitalist accumulation. [12]

Marx and Engels insisted upon the historically progressive character of the American Revolution, an appraisal that was validated by the Civil War. Marx wrote to Lincoln in 1864 that it was in the American Revolution that “the idea of one great Democratic Republic had first sprung up, whence the first Declaration of the Rights of Man was issued, and the first impulse given to the European revolution of the eighteenth century...” [13]

Nothing in Ms. Hannah-Jones’ essay indicates that she has thought through, or is even aware of the implications, from the standpoint of world history, of the 1619 Project’s denunciation of the American Revolution. In fact, the 1619 Project was concocted without consulting the works of the preeminent historians of the Revolution and Civil War. This was not an oversight, but rather, the outcome of a deliberate decision by the *New York Times* to bar, to the greatest extent possible, the participation of “white” scholars in the development and writing of the essays. In an article titled “How the 1619 Project Came Together,” published on August 18, 2019, the *Times* informed its readers: “Almost every contributor in the magazine and special section—writers, photographers and artists—is black, a nonnegotiable aspect of the project that helps underscore its thesis...” [14]

In fact, despite the color barrier favored by Hannah-Jones, a number of the essays included in the 1619 Project were written by “whites.” These efforts—by sociologist Matthew Desmond and historian Kevin Kruse—were no better than the rest. This only goes to prove that the racist viewpoint is rooted not in the racial identity of the author, but rather, in his or her class position and ideological orientation.

In any event, even if the *Times* had to bend its own rules, the “nonnegotiable” and racist insistence that the 1619 Project be produced almost exclusively by blacks was justified with the false claim that white historians had largely ignored the subject of American slavery. And on the rare occasions when white historians acknowledged slavery’s existence, they either downplayed its significance or lied about it. Therefore, only black writers could “tell our story truthfully.” The 1619 Project’s race-based narrative would place “the consequences of slavery and the contributions of black Americans at the very center of the story we tell ourselves about who we are.” [15]

The 1619 Project was a falsification not only of history, but of historiography. It ignored the work of two generations of American historians, dating back to the 1950s. The authors and editors of the 1619 Project had consulted no serious scholarship on slavery, the American Revolution, the abolitionist movement, the Civil War, or Jim Crow segregation. There is no evidence that Hannah-Jones’ study of American history extended beyond the reading of a single book, written in the early 1960s, by the late black nationalist writer, Lerone Bennett, Jr. Her “reframing” of American history, to be sent out to the schools as the foundation of a new curriculum, did not even bother with a bibliography.

Hannah-Jones and Silverstein argued that they were creating “a new narrative,” to replace the supposedly “white narrative” that had existed before. In one of her countless Twitter tirades, Hannah-Jones declared that “the 1619 Project is not a history.” It is, rather, “about who gets to control the national narrative, and, therefore, the nation’s shared memory of itself.” In this remark, Hannah-Jones explicitly extols the separation of historical research from the effort to truthfully reconstruct the past. The purpose of history is declared to be nothing more than the creation of a

serviceable narrative for the realization of one or another political agenda. The truth or untruth of the narrative is not a matter of concern.

Nationalist mythmaking has, for a long period, played a significant political role in promoting the interests of aggrieved middle-class strata that are striving to secure a more privileged place in the existing power structures. As Eric Hobsbawm laconically observed, “The socialists ... who rarely used the word ‘nationalism’ without the prefix ‘petty-bourgeois,’ knew what they were talking about.” [16]

Despite the claims that Hannah-Jones was forging a new path for the study and understanding of American history, the 1619 Project’s insistence on a race-centered history of America, authored by African-American historians, revived the racial arguments promoted by black nationalists in the 1960s. For all the militant posturing, the underlying agenda, as subsequent events were to demonstrate, was to carve out special career niches for the benefit of a segment of the African-American middle class. In the academic world, this agenda advanced the demand that subject matter that pertained to the historical experience of the black population should be allocated exclusively to African Americans. Thus, in the ensuing fight for the distribution of privilege and status, leading historians who had made major contributions to the study of slavery were denounced for intruding, as whites, into a subject that could be understood and explained only by black historians. Peter Novick, in his book *That Noble Dream*, recalled the impact of black nationalist racism on the writing of American history:

Kenneth Stampp was told by militants that, as a white man, he had no right to write *The Peculiar Institution*. Herbert Gutman, presenting a paper to the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, was shouted down. A white colleague who was present (and had the same experience), reported that Gutman was “shattered.” Gutman pleaded to no avail that he was “extremely supportive of the black liberation movement—if people would just forget that I am white and hear what I am saying ... [it] would lend support to the movement.” Among the most dramatic incidents of this sort was the treatment accorded Robert Starobin, a young leftist supporter of the Black Panthers, who delivered a paper on slavery at a Wayne State University conference in 1969, an incident which devastated Starobin at the time, and was rendered the more poignant by his suicide the following year. [17]

Despite these attacks, white historians continued to write major studies on American slavery, the Civil War and Reconstruction. Rude attempts to introduce a racial qualification in judging a historian’s “right” to deal with slavery met with vigorous opposition. The historian Eugene Genovese (1930–2012), the author of such notable works as *The Political Economy of Slavery* and *The World the Slaveholders Made*, wrote:

Every historian of the United States and especially the South cannot avoid making estimates of the black experience, for without them he cannot make estimates of anything else. When, therefore, I am asked, in the fashion of our inane times, what right I, as a white man, have to write about black people, I am forced to reply in four-letter words. [18]

This passage was written more than a half century ago. Since the late 1960s, the efforts to racialize scholarly work, against which Genovese rightly polemicized, have assumed such vast proportions that they cannot be adequately described as merely “inane.” Under the influence of

postmodernism and its offspring, “critical race theory,” the doors of American universities have been flung wide open for the propagation of deeply reactionary conceptions. Racial identity has replaced social class and related economic processes as the principal and essential analytic category.

“Whiteness” theory, the latest rage, is now utilized to deny historical progress, reject objective truth, and interpret all events and facets of culture through the prism of alleged racial self-interest. On this basis, the sheerest nonsense can be spouted with the guarantee that all objections grounded on facts and science will be dismissed as a manifestation of “white fragility” or some other form of hidden racism. In this degraded environment, Ibram X. Kendi can write the following absurd passage, without fear of contradiction, in his *Stamped from the Beginning*:

For Enlightenment intellectuals, the metaphor of light typically had a double meaning. Europeans had rediscovered learning after a thousand years in religious darkness, and their bright continental beacon of insight existed in the midst of a “dark” world not yet touched by light. Light, then, became a metaphor for Europeanness, and therefore Whiteness, a notion that Benjamin Franklin and his philosophical society eagerly embraced and imported to the colonies. ... Enlightenment ideas gave legitimacy to this long-held racist “partiality,” the connection between lightness and Whiteness and reason, on the one hand, and between darkness and Blackness and ignorance, on the other. [19]

This is a ridiculous concoction that attributes to the word “Enlightenment” a racial significance that has absolutely no foundation in etymology, let alone history. The word employed by the philosopher Immanuel Kant in 1784 to describe this period of scientific advance was *Aufklärung*, which may be translated from the German as “clarification” or “clearing up,” connoting an intellectual awakening. The English translation of *Aufklärung* as *Enlightenment* dates from 1865, seventy-five years after the death of Benjamin Franklin, whom Kendi references in support of his racial argument. [20]

Another term used by English speaking people to describe the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries has been “The Age of Reason,” which was employed by Tom Paine in his scathing assault on religion and all forms of superstition. Kendi’s attempt to root Enlightenment in a white racist impulse is based on nothing but empty juggling with words. In point of fact, modern racism is connected historically and intellectually to the Anti-Enlightenment, whose most significant nineteenth century representative, Count Gobineau, wrote *The Inequality of the Human Races*. But actual history plays no role in the formulation of Kendi’s pseudo-intellectual fabrications. His work is stamped with ignorance.

History is not the only discipline assaulted by the race specialists. In an essay titled “Music Theory and the White Racial Frame,” Professor Philip A. Ewell of Hunter College in New York declares, “I posit that there exists a ‘white racial frame’ in music theory that is structural and institutionalized, and that only through a reframing of this white racial frame will we begin to see positive racial changes in music theory.” [21]

This degradation of music theory divests the discipline of its scientific and historically developed character. The complex principles and elements of composition, counterpoint, tonality, consonance, dissonance, timbre, rhythm, notation, etc. are derived, Ewell claims, from racial characteristics. Professor Ewell is loitering in the ideological territory of the Third Reich. There is more than a passing resemblance between his call for the liberation of music from “whiteness” and the efforts of Nazi academics in the Germany of the 1930s and 1940s to liberate music from “Jewishness.” The Nazis denounced Mendelssohn as a mediocrity whose

popularity was the insidious manifestation of Jewish efforts to dominate Aryan culture. In similar fashion, Ewell proclaims that Beethoven was merely “above average as a composer,” and that he “occupies the place he does because he has been propped up by whiteness and maleness for two hundred years.” [22]

Academic journals covering virtually every field of study are exploding with ignorant rubbish of this sort. Even physics has not escaped the onslaught of racial theorizing. In a recent essay, Chanda Prescod-Weinstein, assistant physics professor at the University of New Hampshire, proclaims that “race and ethnicity impact epistemic outcomes in physics,” and introduces the concept of “*white empiricism*” (italics in the original), which “comes to dominate empirical discourse in physics because whiteness powerfully shapes the predominant arbiters of who is a valid observer of physical and social phenomena.” [23]

Prescod-Weinstein asserts that “knowledge production in physics is contingent on the ascribed identities of the physicists,” the racial and gender background of scientists affects the way scientific research is conducted, and, therefore, the observations and experiments conducted by African-American and female physicists will produce results different than those conducted by white males. Prescod-Weinstein identifies with the contingentists who “challenge any assumption that scientific decision making is purely objective.” [24]

The assumption of objectivity is, she claims, a major problem. Scientists, Prescod-Weinstein complains, are “typically monists—believers in the idea that there is only one science ... This monist approach to science typically forecloses a closer investigation of *how identity and epistemic outcomes intermix*. Yet white empiricism undermines a significant theory of twentieth century physics: General Relativity.” (Emphasis added) [25]

Prescod-Weinstein’s attack on the objectivity of scientific knowledge is buttressed with a distortion of Einstein’s theory.

Albert Einstein’s monumental contribution to our empirical understanding of gravity is rooted in the principal of covariance, which is the simple idea that there is no single objective frame of reference that is more objective than any other. *All frames of reference, all observers, are equally competent and capable of observing the universal laws that underlie the workings of our physical universe.* (Emphasis added) [26]

In fact, general relativity’s statement about covariance posits a fundamental symmetry in the universe, so that the laws of nature are the same for all observers. Einstein’s great (though hardly “simple”) initial insight, studying Maxwell’s equations on electromagnetism involving the speed of light in a vacuum, was that these equations were true in all reference frames. The fact that two observers measure a third light particle in space as traveling at the same speed, even if they are in motion relative to each other, led Einstein to a profound theoretical redefinition of how matter exists in space and time. These theories were confirmed by experiment, a result that will not be refuted by changing the race or gender of those conducting the experiment.

Mass, space, time and other quantities turned out to be varying and relative, depending on one’s reference frame. But this variation is lawful, not subjective—let alone racially determined. It bears out the monist conception. There are no such things as distinct, “racially superior,” “black female,” or “*white empiricist*” statements or reference frames on physical reality. There is an ascertainable objective truth, genuinely independent of consciousness, about the material world.

Furthermore, “all observers,” regardless of their education and expertise, are not “equally competent and capable” of observing, let alone discovering, the universal laws that govern the universe. Physicists,

whatever their personal identities, must be properly educated, and this education, hopefully, will not be marred by the type of ideological rubbish propagated by race and gender theorists.

There is, of course, an audience for the anti-scientific nonsense propounded by Prescod-Weinstein. Underlying much of contemporary racial and gender theorizing is frustration and anger over the allocation of positions within the academy. Prescod-Weinstein's essay is a brief on behalf of all those who believe that their professional careers have been hindered by "white empiricism." She attempts to cover over her falsification of science with broad and unsubstantiated claims that racism is ubiquitous among white physicists, who, she alleges, simply refuse to accept the legitimacy of research conducted by black female scientists.

It is possible that a very small number of physicists are racists. But that possibility does not lend legitimacy to her efforts to ascribe to racial identity an epistemological significance that affects the outcome of research. Along these lines, Prescod-Weinstein asserts that the claims to objective truth made by "white empiricism" rest on force. This is a variant of the postmodernist dogma that what is termed "objective truth" is nothing more than a manifestation of the power relations between conflicting social forces. She writes:

White empiricism is the practice of allowing social discourse to insert itself into empirical reasoning about physics, and it actively harms the development of comprehensive understandings of the natural world by precluding putting provincial European ideas about science—which have become dominant through colonial force—into conversation with ideas that are more strongly associated with "indigeneity," whether it is African indigeneity or another. (Emphasis added) [27]

The prevalence and legitimization of racist theorizing is a manifestation of a deep intellectual, social, and cultural crisis of contemporary capitalist society. As in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, race theory is acquiring an audience among disoriented sections of middle-class intellectuals. While most, if not all, of the academics who promote a racial agenda may sincerely believe that they are combating race-based prejudice, they are, nevertheless, propagating anti-scientific and irrationalist ideas which, whatever their personal intentions, serve reactionary ends.

The interaction of racist ideology as it has developed over several decades in the academy and the political agenda of the Democratic Party is the motivating force behind the 1619 Project. Particularly under conditions of extreme social polarization, in which there is growing interest in and support for socialism, the Democratic Party—as a political instrument of the capitalist class—is anxious to shift the focus of political discussion away from issues that raise the specter of social inequality and class conflict. This is the function of a reinterpretation of history that places race at the center of its narrative.

The 1619 Project did not emerge overnight. For several years, corresponding to the growing role played by various forms of identity politics in the electoral strategy of the Democratic Party, the *Times* has become fixated, to an extent that can be legitimately described as obsessive, on race. It often appears that the main purpose of the news coverage and commentary of the *Times* is to reveal the racial essence of any given event or issue.

A search of the archive of the *New York Times* shows that the term "white privilege" appeared in only four articles in 2010. In 2013, the term appeared in twenty-two articles. By 2015, the *Times* published fifty-two articles in which the term is referenced. In 2020, as of December 1, the *Times* had published 257 articles in which there is a reference to "white

privilege."

The word "whiteness" appeared in only fifteen *Times* articles in 2000. By 2018, the number of articles in which the word appeared had grown to 222. By December 1, 2020, "whiteness" was referenced in 280 articles.

The *Times*' unrelenting focus on race during the past year, even in its obituary section, has been clearly related to the 2020 electoral strategy of the Democratic Party. The 1619 Project was conceived of as a critical element of this strategy. This was explicitly stated by the *Times*' executive editor, Dean Baquet, in a meeting on August 12, 2019 with the newspaper's staff:

[R]ace and understanding of race should be a part of how we cover the American story ... one reason we all signed off on the 1619 Project and made it so ambitious and expansive was to teach our readers to think a little bit more like that. Race in the next year—and I think this is, to be frank, what I hope you come away from this discussion with—race in the next year is going to be a huge part of the American story. [28]

The *New York Times*' effort to "teach" its readers "to think a little bit more" about race assumed the form of a falsification of American history, aimed at discrediting the revolutionary struggles that gave rise to the founding of the United States in 1776 and the ultimate destruction of slavery during the Civil War. This falsification could only contribute to the erosion of democratic consciousness, legitimize a racialized view of American history and society, and undermine the unity of the broad mass of Americans in their common struggle against conditions of social inequality and exploitation.

The racist campaign of the *New York Times* has unfolded against the backdrop of a pandemic ravaging working-class communities, regardless of race and ethnicity, throughout the United States and the world. The global death toll has already surpassed 1.5 million. Within the United States, the number of COVID-19 deaths will surpass 300,000 before the end of the year. The pandemic has also brought economic devastation to millions of Americans. The unemployment rate is approaching Great Depression levels. Countless millions of people are without any source of income and depend upon food banks for their daily sustenance.

And while the pandemic rages, the structures of American democracy are breaking down beneath the weight of the social contradictions produced by a staggering level of wealth concentration in a small fraction of the population. The 2020 presidential campaign was conducted amidst fascistic conspiracies, orchestrated from within the White House, to establish a dictatorship. The old adage, "It Can't Happen Here," coined in the 1930s during the ascent of fascism in Europe, has been refuted by events. "It is happening here" is a correct description of the American reality.

In the midst of this unprecedented social and political catastrophe, requiring a united response by all sections of the working class, the *New York Times* has devoted its energies to promoting a false narrative that portrays American history as a perpetual war between the races. In this grotesque distortion there is no place for the working class or for the class struggle, which has been the dominant factor in American social history for the past 150 years, and in which African-American workers have fought heroically alongside their white brothers and sisters. The extreme social crisis triggered by the pandemic, and the desperate conditions that confront tens of millions of working people of all racial and ethnic backgrounds, constitute an unanswerable indictment of the reactionary premises of the 1619 Project. The factual refutation of the 1619 Project's falsification of history is provided in the essays and interviews with distinguished historians published in this volume.

David North
Detroit
December 3, 2020
Notes:

- [1] “The Nat Turner Case,” in *The New York Review of Books*, September 12, 1968.
- [2] Vadim Z. Rogovin, *Bolsheviks Against Stalinism 1928–1933: Leon Trotsky and the Left Opposition* (Oak Park: 2019), p. 2.
- [3] Laurel Leff, *Buried by the Times: The Holocaust and America’s Most Important Newspaper* (Cambridge: 2005), p. 5.
- [4] *New York Times Magazine*, August 18, 2019, p. 18.
- [5] Cited in Peter Gay, *The Enlightenment: The Science of Freedom* (New York and London: 1996), pp. 556–57.
- [6] *Ibid.*, p. 557.
- [7] Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critical Analysis of Capitalist Production I*, Volume I (London: 1974), p. 20.
- [8] Gay, *The Enlightenment: The Science of Freedom*, p. 558.
- [9] R.R. Palmer, *The Age of Democratic Revolution: A Political History of Europe and America, 1760–1800* (Princeton: 1959), p. 5.
- [10] Jonathan Israel, *The Expanding Blaze: How the American Revolution Ignited the World, 1775–1848* (Princeton: 2017), pp. 17–18.
- [11] Friedrich Engels, *Ludwig Feuerbach and the Outcome of Classical German Philosophy* (New York: 2018), p. 49.
- [12] Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critical Analysis of Capitalist Production*, Volume I (London: 1974), p. 703.
- [13] Karl Marx, “To Abraham Lincoln, President of the United States,” in *Karl Marx-Friedrich Engels Collected Works*, Volume 20 (New York: 1984), p. 19.
- [14] “How the 1619 Project Came Together,” accessed on 12/3/2020: <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/18/reader-center/1619-project-slavery-jamestown.html>
- [15] *New York Times Magazine*, August 18, 2019, p. 5
- [16] E.J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780: Program, Myth, Reality* (London: 1991), p. 117.
- [17] Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The “Objectivity Question” and the American Historical Profession* (Cambridge: 1988), p. 475.
- [18] Eugene D. Genovese, *In Red and Black: Marxian Explorations in Southern and Afro-American History* (New York: 1968), p. viii.
- [19] Ibram X. Kendi, *Stamped from the Beginning: The Definitive History of Racist Ideas in America* (New York: 2017), p. 80.
- [20] <https://www.etymonline.com/search?q=enlightenment>
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