

# Republican state legislators move to ban the New York Times' 1619 Project from schools

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Republican-controlled state legislators in several states have moved to ban the *New York Times*' 1619 Project from public school instruction. The laws would deny funding to schools that teach the curriculum, which frames all of American history as a struggle between races, and argues, among other things, that the American Revolution was a conspiracy waged by the Founding Fathers to defend slavery from the British monarchy.

The first such legislation was introduced in July of last year in Arkansas, with the support of the state's fascistic US senator, Tom Cotton, who said in an interview with the *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette*, "The 1619 Project is left-wing propaganda." The Arkansas bill characterized the 1619 Project as "a racially divisive and revisionist account of history that threatens the integrity of the Union by denying the true principles on which it was founded." A state legislative panel rejected the latest proposal in Arkansas on February 9.

On that same day, Republican lawmakers in Iowa filed legislation that would cut state funding for any schools that utilized history curriculums derived from the 1619 Project. The bill claims that the 1619 Project works to "deny or obfuscate the fundamental principles upon which the United States was founded" and went on to state that the focus of public education should be on "promoting an accurate account of this nation's history through public schools and forming young people into knowledgeable and patriotic citizens."

The bill would punish schools that teach the 1619 Project by cutting their budget "by one one-hundred-eightieth for each day of the previous budget year for which the school district used" 1619 Project material. The bill would also slash state aid payments for schools, community colleges, and regent institutions—including the state's three public

universities—that violate the rule. Similar legislation has been filed in Mississippi, Missouri and South Dakota.

The bills have provoked opposition from educators and historians who denounced the attempts by Republican lawmakers to restrict course curriculum and indoctrinate students in right-wing chauvinism. T. Jameson Brewer, an assistant professor at the University of North Georgia, told the *USA Today*, "Do we want historical facts and details that are researched and published by experts taught? Or do we want nationalism taught? That's a very scary sort of suggestion, that schools would engage in ideological nationalism for political needs."

In Arkansas, a teacher has been fired for opposing the legislation. Josh Depner, a history teacher at the Arkansas Arts Academy, was terminated after sending an angry email to state officials who supported the bill. Though he subsequently apologized, the school fired him for allegedly violating their personal technology agreements and code of ethics. Students at the Arkansas Arts Academy have since rallied in support of Depner and demanded his reinstatement.

This latest drive by the Republican legislators exploits the 1619 Project's racist falsifications for a broader aim—to blot out all critical aspects from the teaching of American history and to impose censorship in the schools.

Republican lawmakers and governors throughout the US have moved towards establishing a right-wing, nationalistic school curriculum. Last November, Mississippi Governor Tate Reeves proposed a \$3 million "Patriotic Education Fund" for the purpose of educating "the next generation in the incredible accomplishments of the American Way." Last month, South Dakota Governor Kristi Noem proposed a similar initiative to teach students "why the U.S. is the most

special nation in the history of the world.”

The state-level efforts are linked to the Trump administrations’ 1776 Report, the aim of which was, in Trump’s words, to “restore patriotic education.” The Republicans counterpose the false narrative constructed by the *New York Times* with their own mythologized and chauvinistic narrative that sanctifies the most backward and reactionary tendencies of American culture, including religious fundamentalism, while glorifying the “free market,” thereby justifying the unbridled greed of the capitalist class.

The *World Socialist Web Site* unequivocally opposes attempts by state legislatures at suppression and censorship of the 1619 Project. Furthermore, we condemn any reprisals taken against educators for speaking out against these anti-democratic measures.

However, our opposition to censorship by far-right state legislators does not in any respect lessen our principled opposition to the 1619 Project, a racist falsification of history which denies the progressive character of the American Revolution and the Civil War, and which aims to divide educators and students along racial lines by insisting that the central dividing line in American society, past and present, is race and not class. The 1619 Project argues that all whites are the perpetrators and beneficiaries of the oppression of African Americans, who have “fought back alone” to redeem democracy.

The racist hysteria whipped up by the 1619 Project has itself been used to censor all opposition to identity politics. In the latest spectacle, *Times* science correspondent Donald G. McNeil Jr. was forced to resign after a frenzied campaign over his alleged use of a racial slur in the context of a conversation with students about racism. McNeil’s refusal to toe the line on “white privilege” was also cited by the racist grievance-mongers. Unsurprisingly, the 1619 Project’s Nikole Hannah-Jones played a leading role in this shameful dismissal of the reporter who was leading the *Times*’ COVID-19 coverage.

As always in American politics and culture there is a sinister division of labor between the Democrats and Republicans. The WSWS consistently warned that the 1619 Project was a gift to Donald Trump and the Republican Party. But the attempt by the Republican legislatures to suppress the 1619 Project is also a gift to race-obsessed and essentially reactionary elements in

and around the Democratic Party and *New York Times*.

In the final analysis, the racist 1619 Project and the fascist narrative of the far right represent two sides of the same coin. In different ways, both serve the interests of finance capital by obscuring the irreconcilable class conflict that lies at the heart of American society. Both tendencies promote a reactionary view of American history aimed at dividing and confusing the working class.

For all their talk about justice and righting wrongs, Hannah-Jones and her ilk never raise their voices against the great evil of capitalist society from which all other evils flow: the exploitation of the working class. This is not an accident, but a reflection of the social interests of the narrow, self-centered upper-middle class layer that utilizes identity politics as a weapon to gain access to increased wealth and power. These layers are not opposed to capitalism; rather, they seek to secure a more privileged and secure position for themselves.

In rejecting the identity politics of the petty-bourgeoisie, socialists fight for the unity of all workers regardless of race, gender or other characteristics. Our denunciation of racial politics is a denunciation of the political subordination of the working class to the petty bourgeoisie, which is indifferent and hostile to the needs of workers.

Genuine left-wing opposition to both the reactionary racism of the 1619 Project and the mythologizing of the far right has been led by the WSWS. We encourage educators and students to make use of the forthcoming collection of writings and interviews from the WSWS available here from Mehring Books which refutes the errors and outright falsifications contained in the 1619 Project.



To contact the WSWS and the  
Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](https://wsws.org/contact)**