

“Wuhan lab” theory proponent Nicholas Wade pushed racist pseudo-science in 2014 book

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Over the past month, the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, and *Wall Street Journal* have all published editorials and op-eds endorsing the “credibility” of the theory that COVID-19 was released from the Wuhan Institute of Virology in China.

The majority of these editorials and op-eds cite the writings of Nicholas Wade, the former *New York Times* journalist who, in a May 5 article in the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, translated what began as a nakedly political hoax into quasi-scientific language.

Wade argued that Shi Zheng-li, China’s leading expert on bat viruses, received funding from the National Institutes of Health, in collaboration with zoologist Peter Daszak, to genetically manipulate bat coronaviruses which he claims could have created SARS-CoV-2 and allowed it to escape into the city of Wuhan.

But none of these articles mention the fact that Wade is a known serial fabricator and a leading advocate of racist pseudo-science, whose 2014 book arguing for a genetic basis for differences in intelligence between races was condemned by the scientists whose research he cited, together with more than 140 other leading human developmental biologists.

Nor do they mention that Wade’s book was hailed by former Ku Klux Klan Grand Wizard David Duke—together with other neo-Nazis—as a blow against “Jewish Supremacists.”

Over the past month, Wade’s writings have been cited by the following articles, which used his arguments as the linchpin of their claims that COVID-19 could have been released from the Wuhan Institute of Virology:

- A May 17 editorial by the *Washington Post*, entitled, “Two possible theories of the pandemic’s origins remain viable. The world needs to know”:

Did some byproduct of the research leak, or did workers become inadvertently infected? Was the research carried out in less protected BSL-2 laboratories instead of the more secure BSL-4? Did Dr. Shi successfully manipulate a virus in the lab to add genetic features boosting affinity for human cells, as science journalist Nicholas Wade has suggested in the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*?

- A May 25 “fact checker” article in the *Washington Post*, headlined, “How the Wuhan lab-leak theory suddenly became credible”:

Former New York Times science reporter Nicholas Wade, writing in the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, reviews the

evidence and makes a strong case for the lab-leak theory.

- A May 29 op-ed by Ross Douhat in the *New York Times*, headlined, “Why the Lab Leak Theory Matters”:

This is especially true if there’s any chance that the Covid-19 virus was engineered, in so-called gain of function research, to be more transmissible and lethal—a possibility raised by, among others, a former science writer for this newspaper, Nicholas Wade.

- A May 31 op-ed by Bret Stephens in the *New York Times*, headlined, “Media Groupthink and the Lab-Leak Theory”:

Was it smart for science reporters to accept the authority of a February 2020 letter, signed by 27 scientists and published in *The Lancet*, feverishly insisting on the “natural origin” of Covid? Not if those reporters had probed the ties between the letter’s lead author and the Wuhan lab (a fact, as the science writer Nicholas Wade points out in a landmark essay in *The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, that has been public knowledge for months).

- A June 3 op-ed by Marc A. Thiessen in the *Washington Post*, headlined, “The case that the virus emerged from nature, not a lab, is falling apart”:

Nicholas Wade—a science reporter for nearly 50 years at *Science*, *Nature* and the *New York Times*—points out in his exhaustive report for the *Bulletin of Atomic Scientists* that during the SARS1 epidemic, the intermediate host (civet cats bred for human consumption) was identified in just four months.

- A May 7 op-ed in the *Wall Street Journal* by James Freeman, headlined, “China, Fauci and the Origins of Covid”:

In an exhaustive account of the viral possibilities published this week by the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, Nicholas Wade argues that the Chinese lab is the most likely source of the world-

wide agony.

On May 6, 2014, Wade published a book titled, *A Troublesome Inheritance: Genes, Race and Human History*. The book, according to the *New York Times* review by David Dobbs, says modern genetics shows that “the three major races,” Africans, Caucasians and East Asians, are genetically distinct races that diverge much as subspecies do, and that their genetic differences underlie “the rise of the West.”

The *New York Times* report notes that Wade tells, “for instance, of specific gene variants that reputedly create less trust and more violence in African-Americans and, he says, explain their resistance to modern economic institutions and practices.”

It goes on to flay Wade’s pseudo-scientific method, declaring, “he does this sort of thing repeatedly: He constantly gathers up long shots, speculations and spurious claims, then declares they add up to substantiate his case ... The result is a deeply flawed, deceptive and dangerous book.”

Eric Michael Jonson, writing in *Scientific American*, made similar criticisms in an essay entitled “On the Origin of White Power,” which provides a devastating critique of Wade’s book:

Nicholas Wade is not a racist. In his new book, *A Troublesome Inheritance*, the former science writer for the *New York Times* states this explicitly. “It is not automatically racist to consider racial categories as a possible explanatory factor.” He then explains why white people are better because of their genes.

The article in *Scientific American* notes passages in Wade’s book such as the following:

From a glance at an Eskimo’s physique, it is easy to recognize an evolutionary process at work that has molded the human form for better survival in an arctic environment. Populations that live at high altitudes, like Tibetans, represent another adaptation to extreme environments; in this case, the changes in blood cell regulation are less visible but have been identified genetically. **The adaptation of Jews to capitalism is another such evolutionary process** (emphasis added).

For these and other passages, Wade’s book was hailed by leading white supremacists and anti-Semites, including the website of David Duke, who welcomed it as a “fascinating insight into how Jewish Supremacists attempt to guard the gates of scientific debate,” declaring “there is indeed a biological basis to race.”

The scientists whose work Wade misinterpreted condemned his book in a letter to the *New York Times*, denouncing his “misappropriation of research from our field to support arguments about differences among human societies.” The letter concludes,

Wade juxtaposes an incomplete and inaccurate account of our research on human genetic differences with speculation that recent natural selection has led to worldwide differences in I.Q. test results, political institutions and economic development. We reject Wade’s implication that our findings substantiate his guesswork. They do not... We are in full agreement that there is no support from the field of population genetics for Wade’s conjectures.

The three leading co-signers were joined by a total of 143 faculty members in population genetics and evolutionary biology.

In the dozens of pages of commentary in the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, and *Wall Street Journal* citing Wade’s writings, his role as a serial fabricator and purveyor of white supremacist pseudo-science is never mentioned.

This raises an obvious question: How did repeated citations of a leading white supremacist ideologue and serial liar get through the “fact checkers” employed by America’s three leading newspapers?

After all, when *New York Times* columnist Bret Stephens quoted from a 2005 paper by Gregory Cochran, Jason Hardy and Henry Harpending, which declared, “Ashkenazi Jews have the highest average I.Q. of any ethnic group for which there are reliable data,” the *New York Times* was forced to issue an embarrassing retraction, declaring:

An earlier version of this Bret Stephens column quoted statistics from a 2005 paper that advanced a genetic hypothesis for the basis of intelligence among Ashkenazi Jews. After publication Mr. Stephens and his editors learned that one of the paper’s authors, who died in 2016, promoted racist views. Mr. Stephens was not endorsing the study or its authors’ views, but it was a mistake to cite it uncritically.

But that exact paper was fully embraced by Wade in his 2014 book as “The only serious recent attempt by researchers to delve into the links between Jewish genetics and intelligence.”

In his arguments in support of the “Wuhan lab” conspiracy theory, Wade carries out exactly the type of argumentation for which the *New York Times* reviewer condemned him in 2014: “He constantly gathers up long shots, speculations and spurious claims, then declares they add up to substantiate his case.”

Responding to a question from the WSWS on Twitter, Georgetown University virologist Dr. Angela Rasmussen concluded Wade’s “book on human genetics is actually his on the record beliefs on the genetic basis for intelligence distorted through a lens of racist pseudoscience.”

She added, “So when he puts forth hypotheses about virus origins that are built on a foundation of racist stereotypes, his priors as a purveyor of bullsh*t books about nonexistent genetic links between race & intelligence aren’t considered” by the reports citing him.

What could possibly account for the reliance by all three leading US newspapers on a discredited serial fabricator and promoter of racist pseudo-science in their efforts to promote the Wuhan lab “theory”?

The reliance upon and uncritical citation of Wade can only be explained by the fact that this “theory” is a lie from beginning to end. Its proponents are willing to accept any claim—no matter how filthy and discredited—to further their preconceived aims of distracting attention from the policies responsible for the massive death and suffering caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and redirecting it into xenophobia and nationalist hatred against China.



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