

Nikole Hannah-Jones rejects UNC tenure offer to take position at Howard University, backed by millions in foundation funding

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6 July 2021

New York Times Magazine staff writer and 1619 Project creator Nikole Hannah-Jones announced in an exclusive interview on “CBS This Morning” with co-host Gayle King that she was rejecting an offer of tenure from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (UNC).

Instead, Hannah-Jones explained that she would accept a tenured professorship at Howard University in Washington D.C. as the Knight Chair in Race and Reporting at the Cathy Hughes School of Communication.

Hannah-Jones will join writer Ta-Nehisi Coates (who wrote *We Were Eight Years in Power* about the Obama administration) in founding the Center for Journalism and Democracy at Howard. The center will be financed with \$20 million from the Knight Foundation, MacArthur Foundation, the Ford Foundation and an anonymous donor.

According to a university press release, the new center “will focus on training and supporting aspiring journalists in acquiring the investigative skills and historical and analytical expertise needed to cover the crisis our democracy is facing.”

The 1619 Project was published by the *New York Times* in August 2019 and has been promoted with millions of dollars in funding and a school curriculum developed by the Pulitzer Center on Crisis Reporting. It falsely roots American history in an enduring racial conflict between blacks and whites.

Hannah-Jones’ lead essay, for which she won the 2020 Pulitzer Prize for Commentary, argued that the American Revolution was fought to preserve slavery against the British monarchy and that President Abraham Lincoln was little more than a garden-variety

racist.

The response of preeminent American historians Gordon Wood, James McPherson, James Oakes, Clayborne Carson, Victoria Bynum and others exposed the *New York Times’* effort to reinterpret American history. The *World Socialist Web Site*, in addition to interviewing these historians, has thoroughly refuted the falsifications of the 1619 Project and the lead essay written by Hannah-Jones.

Her other writings have descended into outright racism against whites. The historical falsifications which she promotes and her limited journalistic record since beginning to write for the *Times* in late 2014—just 23 articles—would certainly qualify as red flags in her application for tenure.

The announcement of Hannah-Jones’ decision came less than a week after the Board of Trustees at UNC voted 9-4 in a closed session to grant her a lifetime appointment as the Knight Chair in Race and Investigative Journalism in the Hussman School of Journalism and Media.

Hannah-Jones, who is African American, had threatened to sue UNC for discrimination based on her political views, race and gender after it came to light in May that the board had set aside a vote on her tenure application for further consideration. Hannah-Jones declared that she would not accept the post without being granted tenure, even though she initially accepted a five-year tenure-track position.

However, last week’s vote did not satisfy Hannah-Jones. “And so to be denied it, and to only have that vote occur on the last possible day, at the last possible moment, after threat of legal action, after weeks of protest, after it became a national scandal—it’s just not

something that I want anymore,” she told King. The process which had led to her being granted tenure—a protection granted to a shrinking share of academics—had been too “embarrassing” for her to teach at UNC, she said.

Hannah-Jones explained to King that she had chosen Howard University after fielding a number of offers from other universities because it is one of the United States' historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) where a majority of the faculty and student body are black.

“I’ve spent my entire life proving that I belong in elite white spaces that were not built for black people,” she explained. “I decided I didn’t want to do that anymore. That black professionals should feel free, and actually perhaps an obligation, to go to our own institutions and bring our talents and resources to our own institutions and help to build them up as well.”

In a letter published Tuesday, the Hussman faculty declared their support for Hannah-Jones’ decision to reject the tenure offer, saying that her treatment was “humiliating, inappropriate, and unjust,” and “racist.”

It is highly unlikely that the Hussman School and UNC officials were unaware that Hannah-Jones was entertaining lucrative offers from other schools. As with her journalism, which focuses on making race the fundamental issue in American society, it is clear that the main issue for Hannah-Jones was not getting tenure at UNC but promoting racist politics and using race and claims of racism as leverage for a better position and more money.

In an ironic twist, the history of Hannah-Jones’ chosen perch, Howard University, flies in the face of her claim in the 1619 Project that African Americans have fought alone to advance democratic rights in the United States.

The school’s white namesake, founder and president from 1867 to 1873, General Oliver Otis Howard, was a commander for the Union Army during the Civil War. He participated in multiple bloody battles against Confederate forces, including the First Battle of Bull Run, Antietam and Gettysburg. Howard led forces in Sherman’s March to the Sea from Atlanta to Savannah in 1864, a campaign which saw thousands of slaves liberated.

Howard also served as the head of the Freedmen’s Bureau from May 1865 until July 1874, overseeing a

federal agency responsible for integrating former slaves into the wage labor system and providing them with rations, medical care, schools and courts. Howard pushed for confiscated and abandoned land in the South to be redistributed to freed blacks but was quickly overruled by Democratic President Andrew Johnson.

There is a debased and foul character to the whole campaign over Hannah-Jones’ tenure at UNC—the insistence that Hannah-Jones, no matter her qualifications, deserved a tenured position; the immediate charges of racism against anyone who raised questions about the campaign; the threats of lawsuits if she was denied tenure; and then the announcement that she would not accept it anyway in favor of another position funded with \$20 million.

In its own way, it sums up a central purpose of the racist narrative that the *Times*’ 1619 Project promotes, namely, to advance the aspirations of privileged sections of the upper middle-class for positions of power and wealth, which has absolutely nothing to do with the interests of workers of any race.



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