



Written by [Steven Neill](#) on October 12, 2020

Scholars Call for Discredited 1619 Project to Lose Pulitzer Prize

As unfair as it may seem to people and groups intent on rewriting America's history into one of exploitation and bigotry, there are still "un-woke" organizations out there trying to hold them to a level of academic honesty and accuracy.

Earlier this month, the National Association of Scholars (NAS) assembled a remarkable group of academics who "agreed to host this [public letter](#) to the Pulitzer Prize Board. The letter calls on the Board to rescind the prize it awarded to Nikole Hannah-Jones earlier this year."



The [NAS](#)

is a non-profit organization that seeks to reform higher education. We uphold the standards of a liberal arts education that fosters intellectual freedom, searches for the truth, and promotes virtuous citizenship.

Their letter states:

We call on the Pulitzer Prize Board to rescind the 2020 Prize for Commentary awarded to Nikole Hannah-Jones for her lead essay in "The 1619 Project." That essay was entitled, "Our democracy's founding ideals were false when they were written." But it turns out the article itself was false when written, making a large claim that protecting the institution of slavery was a primary motive for the American Revolution, a claim for which there is simply no evidence.

The 1619 Project has generated excessive controversy since the *New York Times* released it in 2019, even by historians sympathetic to the Project's stated goal of "bringing the African American experience more fully into our understanding of the American past."

The NAS continued,

many of the foremost [historians](#) of our [time](#) and the Times' own [fact-checker](#) severely criticized the Project. The scrutiny has left the essay discredited, so much so that the Times has felt the need to go back and change a crucial passage in it, softening but not eliminating its unsupported assertion about slavery and the Revolution.

Incredibly, the Pulitzer Prize Board awarded its prize to Hannah-Jones for "a sweeping, deeply reported and personal essay for the ground-breaking 1619 Project, which seeks to place the enslavement of



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Africans at the center of America's story, prompting a public conversation about the nation's founding and evolution."

The NAS letter commented,

Note well the last five words. Clearly, the award was meant not merely to honor this one isolated essay, but the Project as a whole, with its framing contention that the year 1619, the date when some twenty Africans arrived at Jamestown, ought to be regarded as the nation's "true founding," supplanting the long-honored date of July 4, 1776, which marked the emergence of the United States as an independent nation.

The letter then highlights:

The Pulitzer Prize Board erred in awarding a prize to Hannah-Jones's profoundly flawed essay, and through it to a Project that, despite its worthy intentions, is disfigured by unfounded conjectures and patently false assertions. To err is human. But now that it has come to light that these materials have been "[corrected](#)" without public disclosure and Hannah-Jones has [falsely](#) put forward claims that she never said or wrote what she plainly did, the offense is far more serious. It is time for the Pulitzer Prize Board to acknowledge its error rather than compound it. Given the glaring historical fallacy at the heart of its account and the subsequent breaches of core journalistic ethics by both Hannah-Jones and the *Times*, "Our democracy's founding ideals were false when they were written" does not deserve the honor conferred upon it. Nor does the 1619 Project of which it is a central part, and which the Board seeks to honor by honoring Hannah-Jones's essay. The Board should acknowledge that its award was an error. It can and should correct that error by withdrawing the prize.

Even the [World Socialist Web Site](#) interviewed several leading historical scholars, including [Victoria Bynum](#), [James Oakes](#), [Gordon Wood](#), [Richard Carwardine](#), [Dolores Janiewski](#), and [James McPherson](#), concerning the *Times*' effort to rewrite American history. One of the questions asked of Revolutionary War expert Gordon Woods was:

The claim made by Nikole Hannah-Jones in the 1619 Project that the Revolution was really about founding a slavocracy seems to be coming from arguments made elsewhere that it was really Great Britain that was the progressive contestant in the conflict and that the American Revolution was, in fact, a counterrevolution, basically a conspiracy to defend slavery.

Woods replied:

The idea that the Revolution occurred as a means of protecting slavery — I just don't think there is much evidence for it, and in fact, the contrary is truer to what happened. The Revolution unleashed antislavery sentiments that led to the first abolition movements in the history of the world.



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