New York Times ignored objections raised by 1619 Project fact-checker

By Eric London
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A fact-checker for the 1619 Project has revealed that the *New York Times* ignored her objection to the Project's claim that the American Revolution was a counterrevolution waged to defend slavery.

In the article, published Friday on *Politico*, ("I Helped Fact-Check the 1619 Project. The *Times* Ignored Me"), Professor Leslie M. Harris of Northwestern University explains that weeks before the August publication of the Project, she was approached by a *Times* research editor to verify historical statements, among them the following:

> One critical reason that the colonists declared their independence from Britain was because they wanted to protect the institution of slavery in the colonies, which had produced tremendous wealth. At the time there were growing calls to abolish slavery throughout the British Empire, which would have badly damaged the economies of colonies in both North and South.

Harris wrote that she "vigorously disputed the claim," writing in *Politico* that, "although slavery was certainly an issue in the American Revolution, the protection of slavery was not one of the main reasons the 13 Colonies went to war." Harris also disputed a second tenet of the Project—its implication that during the colonial period slavery was the same as it was in 1860, at the time of the southern secession that led to the Civil War. This position underlies the Project's claim that slavery was, from beginning in 1619, a fully formed expression of white racism. Both errors appeared in spite of Harris's "vigorous" objections, which included providing "references to specific examples." The Northwestern historian, an expert in antebellum slavery, "never heard back… about how the information would be used."

Harris begins her article by describing how she learned that her objections were disregarded—when she appeared on Georgia Public Radio together with Nikole Hannah-Jones. Harris said she "listened in stunned silence as" the lead essayist and 1619 Project figurehead "repeated an idea that I had vigorously argued against with her fact-checker: that the patriots fought the American Revolution in large part to preserve slavery in North America."

Harris provides a summation of the historical evidence, exposing the claim regarding 1619 Project's claim that the American Revolution was a slaveholders' revolt. She writes:

> [S]lavery in the colonies faced no immediate threat from Great Britain, so colonists wouldn't have needed to secede to protect it. It's true that in 1772, the famous Somerset case ended slavery in England and Wales, but it had no impact on Britain's Caribbean colonies, where the vast majority of black people enslaved by the British labored and died, or in the North American Colonies. It took 60 more years for the British government to finally end slavery in its Caribbean colonies…Far from being fought to preserve slavery, the Revolutionary War became a primary disrupter of slavery in the North American Colonies. Lord Dunmore's Proclamation, a British military strategy designed to unsettle the Southern Colonies by inviting enslaved people to flee to British lines, propelled hundreds of enslaved people off plantations and turned some

> Southerners to the patriot side. It also led most of the 13 Colonies to arm and employ free and enslaved black people, with the promise of freedom to those who served in their armies

Harris's revelation that the *Times* disregarded her is all the more damning because, in the remainder of her article, she solidarizes herself with the Project, and expresses concern that its recklessness with facts will discredit it.

It seems to not have occurred to Harris that the Project's thesis—that "anti-black racism" residing in a "national DNA" is an immutable, supra-historical force—*necessitates* the falsification of history, and not only of the origins of slavery in the Atlantic World and the Revolution, but of the entire course of American and world history. The falsification continues in Hannah-Jones tendentious selection of quotations from Lincoln and in her writing out—in spite of claims about putting black Americans at "the very center" of a new history—figures such as Frederick Douglass, Martin Luther King, and A. Phillip Randolph; as well as the abolitions, civil rights, and labor movements, the Harlem Renaissance, and so much more.

Harris's revelations discredits *Times* magazine editor Jake Silverstein's dismissive January 4 reply to five eminent historians who objected to the Project's claim that the colonists launched the American Revolution to defend slavery. Silverstein claimed that "during the fact-checking process, our researchers carefully reviewed all the articles in the issue with subject-area experts." Silverstein concealed the fact that a *Times* fact-checker had raised serious objections to one of the Project's principal claims.

Silverstein has not commented on Professor Harris's exposure of his dishonest method, which discredits his and Hannah-Jones's pompous and fraudulent claim that the Project represents a breakthrough in the study of American history.

On Friday, March 8, just two days after the publications of Harris's exposure, the *Times* hosted a public event at its plush TimesCenter hall in Manhattan. Titled "The 1619 Project Slavery and the American Revolution: A Historical Dialogue," the meeting promoted the falsification of history to which Harris had objected, i.e., that the American Revolution was a counterrevolutionary slaveowners' revolt. Neither Silverstein nor Hannah-Jones, who jointly introduced the evening, mentioned the article by Professor Harris. Neither did any of the five historians on stage: Karin Wulf, Gerald Horne, Allan Taylor, Annette Gordon-Reed, and Eliga Gould.

The event was an intellectual travesty. Advertised as a discussion among "historians with a range of views" on the 1619 Project's claims about slavery and the American Revolution, the discussion was orchestrated to *exclude* critics and lend a veneer of academic credibility to the 1619 Project.

Wulf moderated the event in such a way as to distort and evade the actual content of criticism of the project. Prior to the meeting, historian Tom Mackaman, whose interviews with leading historians critical of the 1619 Project have been widely read, sent an email to Wulf requesting that he be allowed to speak. This request was denied.

Near the end of the meeting, a few minutes were given over to respond to carefully-vetted questions submitted via e-mail.